



No. 9

ZANE GREY'S ***WESTERN***

MAGAZINE

*All Star
Issue!*

★ Zane Grey

CODE OF THE WEST

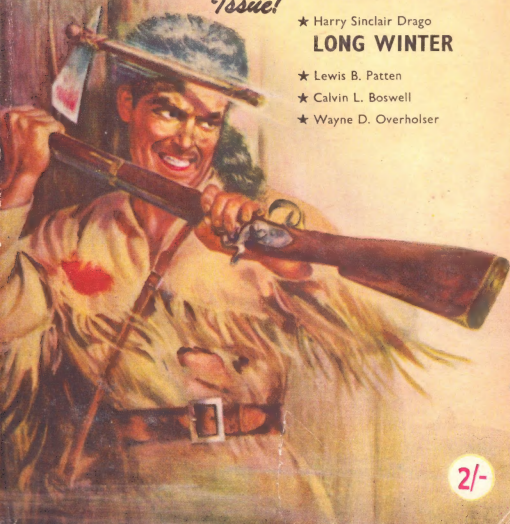
★ Harry Sinclair Drago

LONG WINTER

★ Lewis B. Patten

★ Calvin L. Boswell

★ Wayne D. Overholser



2/-



Hushedly, she said, "You
have the money! You!"

Code of the West

J. STEVENS



ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

VOL. 1, No. 9

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This Month's Magazine Abridgment

WHEN a daring, flirtatious, devil-may-care representative of a jazz-mad generation drops plump into the midst of a staid and respectable Western family, problems are bound to multiply like jack rabbits—and they do just that when Georgie May Stockwell, uninhibited younger sister of Tonto Basin's quiet and conventional schoolma'am, arrives from the East. Schoolteacher Mary Stockwell understands the fun-loving but basically serious natures of the sturdy cowpokes who ride for the Thurmans, and knows that in the end no good can come of the indiscriminate flirtations which Georgie May carries on with most of them. But in spite of her older sister's warnings, Georgie goes on her merry way, always seeming to promise the bedazzled cowhands more than she will actually give. In the estimation of these direct-action men of the Tonto, there are only two kinds of women—the good kind and the bad kind—and they go by the old axiom that where there is so much smoke there must be some fire. Really serious trouble sets in when Cal, youngest and best-looking son of honest old Henry Thurman, falls hopelessly in love with the high-flying Georgie May, who, though she clearly prefers Cal to the other boys, doesn't take to the idea of being "tied down." Not until Bid Hatfield, bold and handsome rider for a neighboring spread, tries to go too far with her does Georgie May begin to realize what a hornets' nest she has stirred up—and then, to her dismay, Cal Thurman, in the extremity of his frustrated emotion, is persuaded by his friend Tuck Merry to use caveman methods in a desperate attempt to impress the girl of his dreams. How Georgie May is finally tamed and peace and sanity are restored to the Tonto provide a fittingly exciting climax to a fast-moving, light-hearted story.



CODE of the WEST

By Zane Grey

CHAPTER ONE

Reluctant Galahad

OF THE many problems that had beset Mary Stockwell during her two years of teaching school in the sparsely settled Tonto Basin of Arizona, this last one was the knottiest, the one that touched her most keenly. For it involved her little sister, Georgiana May, who was on her way to Arizona to be cured, the letter from their mother disclosed, of a slight tendency toward tuberculosis, and a very great leaning toward indiscriminate flirtation.

This day Mary was unusually tired. She had walked all the way up to the little log schoolhouse on Tonto Creek—six miles—and back again to the Thurman ranch at Green Valley, where she boarded. Her eighteen pupils, ranging from six-year-old Mytie Thurman to sixteen-year-old Richard, had broken all records that day for insubordination. Then the hot sun of the September afternoon and the thick dust of the long dry road through brush and forest had taxed her to extreme weariness. Consequently she was not at her best to receive such a shock as her mother's letter had given her.

Well, there's no help for it, she thought wearily, taking up the letter again. Georgiana is on her way—will arrive in Globe on the ninth. Let me see. Goodness, that's tomorrow—Tuesday. The mail stage leaves Globe on Wednesday. She'll get to Ryson about five o'clock. And I can't get away. I'll have to send someone to meet her.

Miss Stockwell seemed divided between distress at this sudden vexatious responsibility, and a reviving tender memory of her sister. What would she do with her? How would the Thurmans take this visit? Georgiana had looked very much like an angel, but she most assuredly had belied her appearance. Taking up the letter again, the perplexed schoolmistress hurried to that part which had so shocked her and scattered her wits:

... Dr. Smith says Georgie's right lung is affected, but Dr. Jones, whom father swears by, says Georgie had just danced and gadded herself into a run-down condition; Anyway, Georgie is in



a bad way, besides being possessed of a variety of devils.

Daughter, you've been away from home going on six years, and part of the time you've been living in the backwoods. Georgiana is now seventeen, and pretty. She knows more than you, who are twice her age. She knows more than I do. Whatever the modern girl has developed, Georgie has it. All our friends love Georgie. And as for the boys—the young men—they are wild about her, and she does her best to keep them that way. I hate to admit it, but Georgie is an outrageous flirt.

But to come to the point—Georgiana absolutely will have her own way. All these modern girls are alike in this respect. They say we parents are "out of date," "we do not understand."—Perhaps they are right. Father thinks Georgie has not been held back by any restraint or anything we have tried to teach her. But I can't believe she is really bad.

Georgiana has graduated from high school. Friends of ours, the Wayburns, are motoring to California, and offered to take Georgie West with them. You may be sure we grasped desperately and hopefully at the idea of sending her. That thrilled her. We are not so well off as formerly. But we made sacrifices and got Georgie all she wanted, and we will arrange to pay her board indefinitely out there. Maybe the West you tell so wonderfully about will cure her and be her salvation. Most assuredly her coming will be a trial for you. But, daughter, we beg of you—accept it, and do your best—for Georgie's sake.

The second perusal of that amazing letter left Miss Stockwell saddened and thoughtful, but free of her former perplexity and worry. Her mother had done her best. If Georgiana could stand

the rugged, virile, wild Tonto Basin, she would not only regain her health, but she would grow away from the falseness and over-sophistication that followed the war.

Then suddenly she was confronted with another aspect of the case—the effect Georgiana would have on this environment, on the Thurmans, and all these good simple people who must come in contact with her sister.

There was bound to be an upheaval at Green Valley. Georgiana might pursue the audacious tenor of her frivolous life back there in Erie, but she could not do it in Arizona. Miss Stockwell vaguely realized how impossible it would be, though she could not then tell just why.

But the thought brought home to her a true appreciation of the boys and young men with whom she had become acquainted. The sons of the three Thurman families she knew especially well, for she had lived a year in their homes. Young men all, mostly in their early twenties, they were; though Enoch Thurman was over thirty, and Serge, his cousin, was a few years younger.

All of them were hard riders of the high bare ranges of the Tonto. Only one of them had a wife. Seldom did any of them ride farther from their homesteads than Ryson. The lure of city life had not penetrated here. Several of the Thurmans had been in the training-camps during the war, and one of them, Boyd Thurman, the best rider, roper, axman, and hunter of the lot, had seen service in France. He had returned uninjured, and seemingly unchanged by all he had gone through. Old Henry Thurman was wont to brag, "Nary a black mark ag'in' Boyd—in camp or war!"

Miss Stockwell had never seen a Thurman, or any of their relatives, under the influence of liquor. They did not lie. If they made a promise it would be kept. Clean, fine, virile, manly young giants they all seemed to her. They were cool, easy, tranquil, contented young backwoodsmen, strong and resourceful in the open. They loved jokes, tricks, and dances. Among these hardy and daring young mountaineers a girl of Georgiana's kind would be like a firebrand in the grass of the prairie.

I wonder what Georgie will think of this ranch, mused Miss Stockwell, as she went out.

She walked back of the house, through the yard, where chickens and calves and dogs had free access, to the corrals. They were huge round pens, made of bare poles, growing old and dilapidated now. The gates were made of roughly sawed yellow-pine boards from Henry's sawmill. Enoch's white mule, old Wise, came toward her. Old Wise was renowned for many things, but especially for his kick. But he would not kick anyone he liked, and he certainly adored Miss Stockwell.

The adjoining corral was large and crowded with dusty rolling horses. Miss Stockwell liked to see the sweaty horses roll. They manifestly enjoyed it so hugely. Then they would lunge, snorting, to their feet, and with a violent wrestling shake of their bodies send off the dust in a cloud. Their next move was to make a beeline for the open gate to the wide green pasture that gave the valley its name.

Miss Stockwell found the riders, nine of them, grouped before one of the wide doors of the barn. They responded to Miss Stockwell's greeting with the slow, drawling Texas speech that never failed to please her.

"Boys, I want one of you to do me an especial favor," she said.

Enoch Thurman came from behind the group. He was the chief of this clan, a lofty-statured rider, the very sight of whom had always fascinated her.

"Wal, Miss Mary, if it's takin' you to the dance, I'm shore puttin' up my bid," he drawled. He had wonderfully clear, light-gray eyes, and the piercing quality of their gaze was now softened by a twinkle.

"I accept your kind invitation, Enoch, but that's not the favor I mean," she said with a smile.

Then Boyd Thurman lunged up, smiling. He was stalwart, big-shouldered, of strong rugged face, hard as bronze, and his blue eyes were as frank as a child's. He tipped back his sombrero, showing a shock of tow-colored hair.

"Teacher, what is this heah favor?"

"Reckon we're all a-rarin' to do you any favor," said Wess Thurman. He was a cousin of Boyd's and Enoch's, twenty-two, with the Thurman stature and wide-open eyes.

"It's to go to Ryson tomorrow to meet my sister," responded Miss Stockwell.

"Tomorrow," spoke up Enoch regretfully. "Wal, I'm shore sorry. But I can't go, Miss Mary. We rode Mescal Ridge today, an' I drove some yearlin's inside our drift fence. They belong to that Bar XX outfit, an' shore there's no love lost between us. I'm drivin' them off our range tomorrow."

Judging from the eagerness of the rest of the boys, with the exception of Cal Thurman, they all preferred meeting Miss Stockwell's sister to driving cattle.

"Goodness! I don't want you all!" she protested. "One of you will do. If

it's such an occasion, you might draw lots."

"Say, can she dance?" suddenly inquired Serge Thurman, brother of Wess. He was a yellow-haired young giant, sunburned, with eyes reddened by heat and dust and wind. Serge was the most gallant, as well as the best dancer, of all the Thurmans. His query opened up a new train of thought, manifestly of intense interest to the boys.

Miss Stockwell had to laugh. "Why, I'm pretty sure she dances," she replied thoughtfully. It began to dawn upon her that she might repay these Thurmans for some of the innocent little tricks they had played on her.

"Now, Miss Stockwell, what's this heah sister of yourn like?" queried Panshandle Ames. He was one of the several men employed by Enoch, like most of them of Texas stock. His question precipitated such renewed interest that it seemed absolutely vital to the issue.

The teacher studied these friendly, queer young men, laughing to herself.

"I'll tell you, boys," she asserted. "I have a picture of her. I'll fetch it—and then you can decide who really *wants* to meet her."

That, at last, was one thing they approved of with instant unity. Miss Stockwell hurried to her room, and with growing consciousness of her opportunity, searched in her effects for the picture of a maiden aunt who was noted for her plain, severe face. She felt a twinge at thought of the use she meant to make of this likeness of the good aunt whom she loved, but did not let such trepidations dissuade her from her purpose. Armed with the photograph, she hurried back to the group of boys in the corral and held it out.

"There!" she exclaimed.

All of them but Cal Thurman crowded round her, eager to see the likeness of her sister. Cal was Enoch's youngest brother, a boy of nineteen, and apparently the only one of the clan not particularly interested in girls.

There was a moment of strained silent attention, then one of them burst out: "Aw, Miss Mary, she ain't a bit like you."

"Not much," said Serge decisively.

"Wal, is *this*—is she really your sister?" queried Enoch slowly, as if trying to remember. "Shore I thought you once showed me a picture."

Then, as a group they became silent, rather awkwardly and slowly realizing that the situation had subtly changed. They backed away from the teacher's side and assumed former lounging positions, most of them calmly resorting to the inevitable cigarette. Enoch regarded his clan with mirth.

"Wal, I reckon you-all are rarin' to chase them Bar XX steers in the maw'n-in'," he drawled with dry sarcasm.

"Enoch, you cain't drive that bunch of yearlin's without me an' Boyd," asserted Serge calmly.

Boyd nodded his assurance of this, and his big eyes shone with a glare as he spoke: "Reckon thet new Bar XX foreman won't like you any better, Enoch. An' considerin' how much thet was, he's going' to be riled when he finds out. He's always achin' to start a fight. An' if you don't drive thet bunch off our range he'll swear we're rustlin'."

"Boyd, I was only doin' Bloom a favor," Enoch replied. "It was near dark when we rounded up that bunch. An' his outfit is ridin' Mescal Ridge to-morrow."

"Shore. But my advice is to get them cattle on his range before the day's busted," went on Boyd. "An' it mightn't be easy to find them all."

Enoch then turned to Miss Stockwell. "Miss Mary, I'm needin' Serge an' Boyd tomorrow, an' so none of us can meet your sister. But shore any of the rest of my obligin' an' lady-killin' outfit can get off for the day."

"Thank you, Enoch," replied the teacher, and turned again to the boys to inquire sweetly, "Now which one of you will do me this favor?"

As her gaze surveyed them all collectively they remained mute, thoughtful, very far away; but when she singled out Panhandle Ames to look directly at him, he drawled:

"Miss Mary, air you forgettin' how I drove you home from the schoolhouse one day?"

"Indeed I'm not!" returned Miss Stockwell with a shudder. "Driving automobiles is not your forte."

"Wal, it shore ain't," replied Panhandle. He knew he was out of the reckoning.

Then it seemed incumbent upon the others to face Miss Stockwell, ready to answer her appealing and reproachful gaze, when it alighted upon each of them.

Dick Thurman was the youngest of the boys, and he was still in school. "You know, teacher, I'd go, if it wasn't for lessons. I'm behind now, you say, an' Father keeps me busy before an' after school."

Lock Thurman was a young man of superb stature, and the quietest, shyest of all the clan.

"Lock, please, won't you go?" asked the teacher.

He shook his head and dropped it, to hide his face. "I reckon I'm afeared of women," he said.

"Huh? Why don't you say you're afeared of thet there girl of yourn—

Angie Bowers?" retorted his brother Wess.

"I ain't no more afeared of her than you are of her twin sister Aggie," responded Lock.

This might have led to another argument had not Miss Stockwell broken in upon them by appealing to Wess.

"Teacher, I just hate to tell you I cain't go for your sister," replied Wess in apparent deep sincerity. "I got a lot to do tomorrow, an' shore need that day off Enoch said we could have. My saddle's got to be mended, an' my boots need half-solin', an' Father's at me to begin doctorin' the dog's feet—for we'll be chasin' bear soon—an' Mother wants a lot done—an' I just cain't go to Ryson. Ask Arizona there. He can leave off cuttin' sorghum for tomorrow."

Thus directed, Miss Stockwell turned to the young man designated as Arizona.

"Aw, Miss Stockwell, I'm 'most sick because I cain't oblige you," asserted this worthy, in the most regretful of voices. "But old Hennery gave me plumb orders to cut thet sorghum before it rains."

"Wal," spoke up Wess, "it hasn't rained for a month an' it'll go dry now till October."

"Nope. It's a-goin' to rain shore aboot day after tomorrer. See them hazy clouds flyin' up from the southwest. Shore sign of storm. You get Con to go."

Con Casey was a newcomer to the Thurman range, an Irishman only a few years in America and not long in the West. When the teacher appealed to Con he sat up, startled. His solemn big pale-blue eyes dilated and stared.

"My Gawd!" he ejaculated in deep solemn tones, "Miss Stockwell, shure I niver was alone wit' a woman in me loife."

The boys guffawed at this, and cast sly banter at him, but there was no doubt that they believed him.

Miss Stockwell was enjoying the situation hugely, and saw that it would probably work out exactly as she had hoped. Then what a climax on the morrow, when Georgiana appeared on the scene!

Tim Matthews, another rider, added his ridiculous excuse to avoid meeting the teacher's sister; and the last one, excepting Cal Thurman, nonchalantly made a statement that he was not very well and might soon be having the doctor from the village.

At that Cal slouched up with all his five-foot-eleven of superb young manhood and surveyed his brothers and comrades in amused derision.

"You're a lot of boobs, I'll tell the world," he said.

Miss Stockwell thrilled at this. This nineteen-year-old son of Henry Thurman's was, in her opinion, the finest of the whole clan. He had all the hardiness, simplicity, and ruggedness of the Tonto natives, and somewhat more of intelligence and schooling. He seemed more modern and was fairly well read.

"Teacher, I'll be glad to go meet your sister," he declared, turning to her. "I was only waitin' to see how they'd wiggle out of it."

"Thank you, Cal. I'm certain you won't be sorry," replied the teacher gratefully.

"She's to come on the stage from Globe?" inquired Cal, as he walked with Miss Stockwell toward the corral gate.

"Yes. Tomorrow."

"What'll I take—the buckboard or car?"

"It's an awful old clap-trap—that bundle of rusty iron," observed the

teacher. "I don't believe it's as safe as the buckboard."

"Sure I'll get her here safe," replied Cal with a laugh.

By this time they had reached the corral gate, which he opened for her. Suddenly loud cries of mirth resounded from the boys back by the barn. The teacher turned with Cal to see what had occasioned them such amusement. Some of them were standing with their heads close together and were apparently conversing earnestly.

Cal gazed at them suspiciously. "Say, that outfit is up to tricks," he muttered.

"Tricks!" echoed Miss Stockwell.

"Sure. Just look at Tim. He's planin' something now. He always wags his head that way when he's—Aw, I can read their minds."

"What are they going to do?" inquired Miss Stockwell curiously.

"They'll be in Ryson tomorrow when I meet your sister," he answered grimly.

"What! They will?" cried the teacher, almost too eagerly. Cal looked at her dubiously. Almost like a flash came the inspiration to Miss Stockwell to go on with the deception and not enlighten Cal as to the truth regarding Georgiana. He would be all the more amazed and dazed when the realization burst suddenly upon him. How supremely happy he would be to lord it over his tricky comrades!

"Let me see that picture you showed the boys—so I'll know her," said Cal.

Miss Stockwell handed it to him without a word. Cal gazed at it for a moment.

"Can't see any resemblance to you," he remarked presently. "She's homely an' you're good-lookin'."

"Thank you, Cal," replied Miss Stockwell demurely. "I appreciate your com-

pliment. But you didn't have to say so just because you found my—my sister plain."

"Say!—I mean it, teacher. Why, Enoch thinks you're the best-lookin' woman he ever saw. An' sure he's a good judge."

Miss Stockwell felt a little warmth on her cheek that was not all the westering sun.

"Cal, I think I'd take the buckboard instead of that old car," she suggested, thinking of the spirited black horses usually driven with the buckboard, and how much more they might appeal to a girl.

"Aw, she won't mind the looks of that old gas-wagon. An' sure I don't care," said Cal with a laugh. "You see, the stage gets in late sometimes, an' if I take the car I can drive your sister out here quick, before dark. It's fifteen miles to Ryson, you know, an' would take me several hours with the team. I'd like to get home before dark."

"Why—so particularly? I've heard how you can ride the trails after night."

"Aw, that outfit will be up to some trick, an' between you an' me I'd rather not be caught along a dark road with that old—I mean—your sister," replied Cal, finishing lamely.

"Oh, I see," mused Miss Stockwell. "Very well, Cal. You do as you think best. But take a hunch from me, as you boys say. You won't be sorry I inflicted this job on you."

"Aw, now, teacher, I didn't mean you'd done that," he protested. "It's only Tim an' those darn fools. They've got a chance to get even. You don't know what I did to them last dance."

"Well, I don't care what you did to them, or what they do to you—tomorrow. You're not going to be sorry you went. You might be very glad."

"Why?" he asked. He had not the slightest idea what she meant. "Maybe she's rich an' will give me a new saddle or somethin'," he remarked, jokingly.

"Maybe. She'll give you *something*, that's certain," replied Miss Stockwell mysteriously.

CHAPTER TWO

Tuck Merry

NEXT morning when Cal presented himself at the breakfast table, fully two hours later than the usual time

for the riders, he was filled with dismay to discover that several of his comrades had not gone off about their range tasks.

"Howdy," was Panhandle's greeting.

"Mawnin', Cal," drawled Arizona.

"Wal, Cal, you shore bit the hay last night," said Wess dryly.

"Reckon it's bad fer you to have meetin' ladies on yore mind," added Tim Matthews solicitously.

With a knowing smile Cal passed the boys at the long table and proceeded to a bench against the log wall, where he filled a basin with water and vigorously washed face and hands. In fact, he splashed so violently and shook his tousled wet head so vehemently that he dashed water clear to the table.

"Hey, air you a whale blowin'!" complained Panhandle.

"Naw, he's only coolin' off his haid," observed Tim.

Cal went about his morning ablutions without paying any attention to his tormentors; and he broke his rule of shaving only once a week.

"He's shavin'," ejaculated Arizona.

"Got on his Sunday jeans, too," observed Wess. "Reckon he wants to look handsome."

"Rarin' to go!" exclaimed Tim mockingly.

When Cal finally turned to the breakfast table the others had almost finished eating. Cal called into the kitchen, "Mother, won't you or Molly bring me somethin' to eat! These hawks out here have grazed like sheep across a pasture."

"Cal," replied his mother, "you oughta get up in the mawnin'."

Then his sister Molly appeared, carrying several smoking dishes which she set down before him. She was a wholesome-looking girl of about seventeen.

"Cal, can I go to town with you?" she asked.

"I should say not," he replied.

"But I want to buy some things."

"I'll buy them for you," replied Cal.

"Miss Stockwell left a list of things she wants."

"All right. Has she gone to school?"

"Yes. She went with father in the buckboard."

Then Cal began his breakfast in silence, aware of the bland observance of his comrades, and he did not waste any time eating. Pushing back his empty plate, he looked square at them.

"Not ridin' today, huh?" he queried.

"Nope," replied Wess laconically.

"Nor tacklin' any of the lot of work that ought to be done?"

"Nope."

"Well, what are you goin' to do today!" deliberately questioned Cal.

"Reckon I'm takin' a day off," said Wess serenely.

"Goin' to Ryson?" went on Cal grimly.

"Shore. There ain't any excitement

round heah. An' I've got a world of stuff to buy. Tobacco an' horseshoes an' cartridges, an'—"

"I'll buy your stuff," cut in Cal.

"Couldn't think of trustin' you," returned Wess blandly. "Besides, I want to see Angie."

"She's not home, an' you know it," rejoined Cal. Then he directed his gaze at Panhandle Ames. "Reckon you've important reasons to show up in Ryson—huh?"

"Cal, I jest naturally got to go. There's a lot—"

"Bah!" interrupted Cal as he rose to his feet, shoving the bench seat backward. "Goin' to ride in on horse-back?"

"Nope. We're takin' the big car," said Wess. "You see, Uncle Henry wants flour, grain, an' a lot of supplies he ordered an' needs bad. Oh, we'll have a load comin' back."

"I wanted the big car," retorted Cal hotly. "Didn't Father know I was goin' to meet a lady?"

"I reckon he did, for when we told him how bad we needed it to fetch back all the stuff, he said you could drive the Ford," replied Wess.

"An' Father's gone with the buckboard!" ejaculated Cal, almost showing distress.

"Yes, he's drivin' teacher to school, an' then he's goin' to Hiram Bowes's."

"Cal, seein' what a meekanik you air an' how you can drive, it seems to us heah that you'll go along in the Ford like a turkey sailin' downhill," said Panhandle Ames.

Cal gazed at these four cronies in slow-gathering wrath. Finally he let go.

"Wess, I'll bet you a horse to a pouch of tobacco that you'll get licked for this job."



"Say! What job are you ravin' aboot? An' who's gonna lick me? You can't, Cousin Cal."

"I'm not afraid to tackle it again, an' if I can't by golly! I'll find someone who can," retorted Cal darkly.

With that he abruptly turned away from his tormentors and strode for the corrals. The task imposed upon him by the schoolteacher had assumed more than irksome possibilities. Manifestly it had furnished his cousin and comrade riders an unusual opportunity. They would do anything under the sun to make him miserable.

He went directly to look over the Ford car. It had seen three or four years more than its best days. But it miraculously held together and really did not look like the junkheap it actually was. That was because Cal's father had covered it recently with a paint he wanted to get rid of.

Cal Thurman loved horses, and as a rider he was second only to his famous brother Boyd. But he hated automobiles and simply could not understand what made them run or stop or get out of order. This morning, however, the deceitful engine started with a crack and a bang, and, to Cal's amazement, in a moment was humming like a monster bee.

Cal felt elated. Forthwith he left the engine running, saw that there was plenty of gasoline and oil, and then hurried back to the house. Donning his jacket and his big black sombrero, he presented himself in the kitchen for orders from the feminine members of the family. His elder sister, Mary, was

not there, but Molly, in her requests, made up for two. Cal's mother gave him money and instructions, and as he was about to go she called him back.

"Son, listen," she said, in lower tone.

"Shore them towheids air up to some mischief. Now don't forget your manners, whatever they do. It speaks well for you that you offered to meet teacher's sister. Carry it through, Cal. Be courteous to a guest."

"All right, Mother, I'll be good," replied Cal with a laugh, and bounded out on the porch and off toward the corral.

Upon reaching the Ford, he was relieved and amazed to find the engine still running—not only running, but actually softly humming, with an occasional purr.

Cal got out of the corral and down on the valley road without being hailed from behind—a fact that he took as a good start to his adventure. Then he forgot the boys and lost himself in attention to the car and the sensation of driving along the shady, beautiful road.

Four or five miles took Cal down out of the foothills into the level brush-covered valley lands that led to Ryson. Here and there, at long intervals, lay the ranch of a cattleman. All the old settlers in this country let their stock range over unfenced government lands. Most of them had homesteaded the one hundred and sixty acres allotted by the government, and whenever Cal rode through this district he was possessed of a stronger desire to settle on a place of his own.

"I'll homestead that Bear Flat, if father will let me, this very fall," he soliloquized. "Wess has his eye on Mesa Hill, an' I'll bet he's just waitin' to save enough money to marry one

of them darn twins. No marryin' for me. Give me my horses an' a dog an' a gun."

So young Thurman drove on along the road, with the dry, warm, fragrant breeze in his face, and his thoughts leisurely following idle, dreamy channels. At length he came out into country flat enough for him to see the blue peaks of the Mazatzal range to the south, and to the north the wonderful Mogolion Rim, a black-and-yellow wandering wall of mountain, horizon-long, and ending in the purple distance of the west. This valley was poor in grass, but rich in desert vegetation, such as low scrub oak, and thorny brush, and manzanita, and mesquite cactus.

Several miles east of Ryson he turned a curve in the road to see a tall lanky young man plodding wearily along, bowed under the burden of a bundle wrapped in canvas.

"Hey, want a lift?"

The young man raised a cadaverous pale face that quickly aroused Cal's sympathy.

"Thanks. I'll say I would," replied the traveler, and he lifted the bundle down from his stooped shoulders.

"Throw it in back an' ride in front with me," suggested Cal, eying him with growing interest. Upon closer view this individual appeared to Cal to be the most singularly built human being he had ever seen. He was very tall, and extremely thin, and so loose-jointed that he seemed about to fall apart. His arms were so long as to be grotesque—like the arms of an ape—and his hands were of prodigious size. He had what Cal called a chicken neck, a small head, and the homeliest face Cal had ever looked into.

"I was all in—and lost in the bargain," said he. The freckles stood out prominently on his wax-colored skin.

"Lost? What place were you trying to find?" queried Cal as he started the car again.

"I've hiked from Phoenix. And a couple of days this side of Roosevelt Dam I butted into a gas station along the road—Chadwick. The man there told me I could get a job at the Bar XX ranch, and where to find the trail. I found a trail all right, but it led nowhere. I got lost and couldn't find my way back to Chadwick. Been ten days and nights."

"Huh! You must be hungry?"

"I'll say so."

"Well, you're way off the track. Bar XX ranch is east. You've traveled north. An' I happen to know Bloom, the foreman of that outfit. He doesn't want any men."

"It's kinda hard to get a job," replied the fellow, with a sigh. "Made sure I could catch on in the Salt River Valley. But everybody's broke there, same as me, and I guess they'd just as lief not see any service men."

"You were in the army?" asked Cal.

"No. I was a marine. I went through Chateau Thierry, and now by God! I can't get work in my own country," he replied bitterly.

"Say, Buddy, if you're on the level you can get a job in the 'Tonto,'" returned Cal.

Ranches gave place to cottages, widely separated, and these in turn to the row of square-fronted, old, and weather-beaten frame and stone structures that constituted Ryson. The one street appeared as wide as a public square. Along its quarter of a mile of business section could be seen several cattle, two horses, a burro, and some dogs, but no people. A couple of dilapidated automobiles marked the site of the garage, which had evidently once been

a blacksmith's shop. The town seemed enveloped in the warm, drowsy, sleepy air of midsummer.

Cal stopped his Ford at the garage. "Say, will you have dinner with me?" he queried of his silent companion.

"Will I? Boy, lead me on," replied the ex-marine.

"Glad to have you," responded Cal. "But we're early. There's the hotel—that gray house with the wide porch. You can wait for me there."

"You'll find me anchored, and I'm hoping the dinner bell will ring quick," he replied, taking his bundle and shuffling away in the direction indicated.

Leaving the car there, Cal proceeded into the big barnlike general store and post office, and set about the task of selecting and purchasing the things enumerated by the womenfolk of the Thurman household. Then he carried the packages out to the car and deposited them on the back seat. "Reckon she'll have a lot of stuff to pack," he muttered, suddenly reminded of his expected passenger.

After this he repaired to the hotel porch, there to find the cadaverous individual waiting with hungry eyes.

In the ensuing half hour Cal was to learn that a kind action, however thoughtlessly entered into, could have singular effect, not only upon the recipient, but upon him who offered it. How good this meal must have been to the fellow! Cal's curiosity followed his sympathy.

"My name's Cal Thurman," he said, at the end of the dinner. "What's yours?"

"Tuck Merry," was the reply.

"Say, that's a funny name. Merry! It sure doesn't suit you, friend. An' Tuck—never heard it before."

"It's a nickname. I was in the marines. They're a scrappy bunch. An' every time I punched a buddy I'd tuck him away to sleep. So they nicknamed me Tuck."

"Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed Cal in wondering admiration. "You must have a punch?"

"Yes. It just comes natural," replied Merry simply. "I've got a couple of mitts, too. See there."

He doubled his enormous hands and showed Cal two fists of almost incredible size.

"Say!" ejaculated Cal, with shining eyes. Then an idea flashed like lightning through his mind. "See here, Tuck, you said you wanted a job?"

"I'll say I said so," returned Merry, rousing to interest.

"Are you well? I mean are you strong?" queried Cal, hesitatingly. "You look like you'd fall in two pieces."

"I'm a deceiving cuss. Pretty much tuckered out now. But I was husky when I started West. A little rest and a mess-table like this would soon put me in as good shape as when I was one of Dempsey's sparring partners."

"What?" cried Cal, breathlessly.

"See here, matey. I was raised on the waterfront in New York. Do you get that? Was in the navy for years. Finally was boxing instructor. Then after the war I knocked around in sparring bouts. Last job I had was with Dempsey."

"Whoop-ee!" ejaculated Cal. "Say, Tuck, I've taken a liking to you."

"I'll say that's the first good luck I've had for many a day," returned Merry feelingly.

"I'll get you a job—two dollars a day an' board—all the good grub you can eat," blurted out Cal, breathlessly and low. "Up on my father's ranch. It's

Tonto country, an' once you live there you will never leave it. You can save your money—homestead your hundred an' sixty acres—an' some day be a rancher."

"Cal, I ain't as strong as I thought," replied Tuck weakly. "Don't promise so much at once. Just find me work an' a meal ticket."

"My father runs a sawmill," went on Cal. "He always needs a man. An' all us riders hate sawin' wood. That job would give you time off now an' then, to ride with us an' go huntin'. I'll give you a horse. We've got over a hundred horses out home. Tuck, the job's yours if you'll do me a little favor."

Tuck Merry held out his huge hand and said, "Mate, there ain't nothing I wouldn't do for you."

"Listen," whispered Cal intensely. "First, you're not to tell a soul that you were in the marines an' how you got that name Tuck an' was one of Dempsey's boxin' pardners."

"I get you, Cal. I lose my memory."

Cal was now tingling with thrilling glee at the enormous possibilities of his idea.

"Tuck, I'm the baby of the Thurman family," he went on. "I've two brothers an' seven cousins, all of which think I'm spoiled. Father gave me more time for schoolin' an' I've had a little better advantages, maybe. An' these fellows all pick on me to beat hell. Now don't let me give you the idea there's any hard feelin'. Not at all. I sure think heaps of all the boys, an' as for Enoch an' Boyd, my brothers, I sure love them. But they all make life awful tough for me. Lately all my cousins seem to want to beat me up. They say I'm gettin' big enough an' that it ought to be done right before I take the bit in my teeth. Wess Thurman licked me

bad not long ago. They've all had their fun with me, an', darn it—I've never licked a single one of them. They're older an' bigger—Now what I want you to do is to lick all of them."

"Ain't you givin' me a large order, matey?" queried Merry, smiling for the first time.

"Not yet. Aw, Tuck, that'll be easy. You needn't do anythin' but wait, an' when one of them starts somethin' you just tuck him away. It will tickle my father 'most as much as me."

"I'll do my best," promised Merry. "What else? What's the *large* order, if this one ain't much?"

"Now I'm comin' to hard feelin's," responded Cal, with more grimness than humor. "There's Bloom, foreman of the Bar XX ranch. Bad blood between his outfit an' the Thurmans. I'd like you to beat the daylights out of Bloom, an' a couple others."

"Cal, I heard this was wild country, this Tonto. Isn't there liable to be gun-play?"

"Why, if you packed a gun it might be risky. But if you *don't* there's no danger. You'll fool these riders somethin' awful, pard Tuck."

"You're on. Pard she is," replied Tuck, offering his huge hand, and he crushed Cal's fingers in a tremendous grip. Cal jerked, writhed, and then sank down with a groan.

"Say, man! Let go!" he cried, and then, as his hand came free, limp and crumpled, he rubbed it and tried to move his fingers. "Sufferin' bobcats! I want to use this hand again." Then he laughed with grim glee. "Tuck, you're goin' to give me a lot of joy. Now let's see. You can go back to Green Valley with me. I'm to meet a woman, sister of our schoolteacher, an' take her home. I reckon you'll need to buy some things,

unless you've got some Sunday clothes in that bundle."

"These are my swell togs," replied Tuck with a grin. "There's nothing in my pack but blankets, some odds an' ends, an' a pair of boxing-gloves."

"Huh! Then you can teach me to box?" queried Cal.

"Cal, in three months I'll have you so you can stand your nice relatives in a row an' lick them all one after another."

"Glory!" ejaculated Cal. "Here's some money, Tuck. You go buy what you need. An' be sure you're hangin' round when that outfit rides in from Green Valley. They're up to some job."

"Pard Cal, I'll be there with bells on," replied the lanky Tuck.

Cal parted from his new-found friend and went out to scan the long, bare, dusty road that led eastward toward Green Valley. No sign of the boys yet! He did not wish them any very bad luck, but he hoped their car would break down. Then he went back to the store to telephone. First he called up Roosevelt, to learn that the stage was ahead of time and had left there two hours earlier. Next he telephoned to Packard, a post office and gasoline station on the Globe road. His call was answered by Abe Hazelitt, a young fellow he had known for years.

"Hello, Abe. This's Cal Thurman—talkin'. How are you?"

"Howdy, Cal," came the reply, in Abe's high-pitched drawl. "Wal, I was shore fine jest lately, but now I'm dinged if I know whether I'm ridin' or walkin'."

"What's the matter, Abe?" asked Cal.

"Cal, I'm gosh-durned if I know. But the stage jest rolled in—an' somethin's happened."

"Stage? Ahuh!" replied Cal, with

quickenin' of interest. "That's what I wanted to know about. On time, huh?"

"Way ahead of time. We all near dropped dead. Jake's drivin' like hell today, I'll tell the world."

"Abe, is there a lady passenger on the stage?"

Cal heard his friend chuckle at the other end of the wire. "Cal, I should smile."

"That's good. She is a sister of our schoolteacher, Miss Stockwell. I've been sent to meet her here an take her out home. Abe, please tell her that Cal Thurman is waitin' at Ryson."

A long low whistle came over the wire. Then: "My Gawd! the luck of some fellers!"

"Luck? Say, Abe, have any of the boys phoned you—Wess or Tim or Pan-handle?" queried Cal suspiciously.

"Nary one, Cal. You'll have her all to yourself. An' believe me—"

"Cut it out," almost yelled Cal. "I know what you mean by luck. Somebody had to meet her, an' that lowdown outfit at Green Valley just quit bare-faced when they saw her picture."

"They did! Wall, I'll be dinged!"

"You'll tell the lady, please?"

"I shore will. An' say—Hold on, Cal. Don't hang up—hello!"

"Hello!" replied Cal. "I'm still on, but in a hurry."

A much lower-toned and hoarser voice continued breathlessly: "Cal, she was jest in here before you called. I seen her. She's wearin' socks! Anyway, I seen her bare knees—they're pink—an' so help me Moses they're painted! Cal, she's shore some—"

"Shut up!" roared Cal. "You can't josh me. You're a liar, Abe Hazelitt. The boys have put you on."

"Naw, Cal, I hope to die," replied Abe, apparently bursting with glee. "I

know what's a-comin' to you, Cal Thurman."

Cal slammed up the receiver and rushed away from the telephone.

"Pink knees! Painted!" he fumed. "What that outfit can't think of is sure beyond me!"

CHAPTER THREE

Blond Bombshell

CAL had scarcely left the post office, to walk down the road toward the garage, when he espied the boys from Green Valley. They were grouped around his Ford car with the garage mechanics.

He approached them with long strides. Upon nearer view he found, to his amazement, that the boys were clean-shaven, and all had donned spick-and-span new suits of overalls, and wore their Sunday sombreros and shiny boots. Wonderful to see, Arizona, who was noted for his slovenly dress, appeared arrayed as the others, and he positively shone.

"Howdy, Cal! I'm shore congratulatin' you," drawled Wess, placidly indicating the Ford car.

"Pard Cal, yore some driver," added Arizona.

"How air you, boy?" queried Tim serenely.

"Say, you seem mighty all-fired glad to see me," replied Cal sarcastically, running his keen gaze from one to another.

Cal pushed the boys away from the Ford car and began to prow around it to see if they had done anything to it. Here he was almost helpless. He examined engine, tires, wheel, and the var-

ious parts necessary to the operation of the car, but he could not be sure whether they had tampered with it or not. Certainly they had not had much time to do anything. Nevertheless, with the garage mechanics in the secret, they might have accomplished a good deal.

"Say, if you hombres have been monkeyin' with this car!" he exclaimed, glaring darkly at them.

"Cal, you shore are a chivulus feller where ladies are concerned," drawled Wess, "but you ain't got any but low-down idee for your relations an' friends."

"Reckon you ain't insinuatn' I'd do some underhand trick?" queried Panhandle reproachfully.

"Cal, you've been punched more'n onct fer insultn' remarks," added Tim Matthews meaningly.

"Aw!" burst out Cal, exploding helplessly. "You fellows can't pull the wool over my eyes. An' as for your punch, Tim Matthews, I'd like to know if you think you can go on punchin' me forever?"

"Wal, mebbe forever would be far-fetched," replied Tim dryly. "But jest so long as you live I shore will be able to punch you."

Cal gazed steadily into the grinning face of his friend.

"Tim, you're the big gambler of the Thurman outfit, aren't you?"

"Wal, I reckon thet distinctshun has been forced upon me," replied Tim.

"Ahuh!—You know my black horse Pitch, don't you, an' how you've tried to buy, borrow, an' steal him?"

"I'm denyin' the last allegashun," retorted Tim.

"Well, I'm bettin' Pitch against your bronc Baldy that I lick you before I'm a year older."

All the boys stared, and Tim's lean jaw dropped.

"See heah, Cal," said Wess. "thet's a fool bet! You know you love Pitch an' he was Enoch's gift to you—the best hoss ever broke in the Tonto."

"Sure I know, an' you can gamble I wouldn't bet if I didn't know I could lick Tim," returned Cal.

Tim came out of his trance to seize his golden opportunity.

"Boys, I call his bluff. The bet's on —my Baldy ag'in' his hoss Pitch. An' all of you paste the date in your hats."

Cal said deliberately, "Now, boys, I call on you, too. An' listen. I know you're up to some tricks, an' that Tim is at the bottom of it. I want you all to be around when I lick him."

This sally brought forth loud laughter from all the listeners except Tim.

"We'll shore be there, Cal," said Wess.

Without any further comment Cal cranked the Ford, finding, to his secret amazement, that the engine again started with unusual alacrity, and then he climbed to the driver's seat. Something was wrong with the car, surely. It ran too easily and smoothly. All at once he conceived an absolute conviction that the boys had tampered with it in some uncanny way. He drove to the post office and turned round, and stopped beyond the door near the porch. A number of natives were sitting on a bench, smoking pipes and whittling sticks, awaiting the one event of Ryson's day—the arrival of the stage. On the edge of the porch sat Tuck Merry, beside his canvas roll of baggage.

At that moment, as Cal was about to get out he espied three horsemen trotting down the road from the east. He peered at them, and recognized Bloom of the Bar XX outfit, and two of his riders, one of them Hatfield.

"Well, I'll be darned!" ejaculated Cal. "Talk about your hard luck!"

To be made the victim of tricks by his own relatives and friends was bad enough, but to have to endure them in the face of this Bar XX outfit, especially Hatfield, was infinitely worse.

He watched them ride past the garage, past Wess and his comrades, who nodded casually to them, and down the road to the hitching-rail under the cottonwood tree near the post office. They dismounted. Bloom and Hatfield approached, while the third rider, a stranger to Cal, began to untie a mail sack from the back of his saddle. Bloom was square-shouldered and stocky, with considerable girth. He had a hard face, and though it showed him under forty, it was a record of strenuous life. Hatfield was young, a handsome, stalwart figure. He swaggered as he walked. His garb was picturesque, consisting of a huge beaver sombrero, red scarf, blue flannel shirt, just now covered with dust, and fringed chaps ornamented in silver.

"Howdy, Thurman," greeted Bloom as he came up. "Met yore dad this mornin', an' he was tellin' me you'd come to town."

"How do, Bloom," returned Cal, rather shortly.

Hatfield did not speak to Cal, though he gave him a sidelong look out of his sharp, bold eyes. Hatfield had few superiors as a rider and roper, and he was a bad customer in a fight, as Cal remembered to his grief.

These two riders passed Cal, and had mounted the porch before they espied the ludicrous figure of Tuck Merry lounging with his back against a post. Bloom glanced at him, then halted to stare.

"Haw! Haw!" he guffawed, striding on again. "Hat, did you see that? Reck-on it got away from a circus."

Whereupon Hatfield turned to look at Merry, but though Merry evidently saw he was the object of ridicule, he gave no sign. Then Bloom and Hatfield, after speaking to the natives on the bench, disappeared in the store.

Cal heard the droning hum of the stage. So did the natives hear it. They woke up and stirred to animation.

Cal saw Wess and the boys leisurely approaching. Then he caught Tuck Merry's eye and beckoned to him. The lanky fellow slid off the porch to tower erect.

"Did you notice the two fellows who just went in the store?" queried Cal.

"I'll say so," replied Merry.

"Ahuh! Well, the fat one was Bloom, head of the Bar XX outfit, an' no friend of the Thurmans. The other was Hatfield, one of his riders. There's bad blood between him an' me. Now look down the road. See those four boys comin'? Well, they belong to the Thurman outfit. Wess, the tallest, is my cousin. They're just the finest fellows. But they're hell on tricks an' fights. They've put up some job on me today. Now you just hang around an' watch, until I call you."

"I get you, Steve," returned Merry with a smile, and then lounged away to his seat on the porch.

Cal remained sitting in the Ford. Wess and his comrades came leisurely on, and lined up on the porch, as calm as deacons. Natives of Ryson appeared on the road, approaching the store and post office. Then the big auto-stage turned into the main road and came on with a roar, leaving a cloud of dust behind. It appeared to be loaded down with bags and boxes, piled on top and



tied on the sides. The driver came on with unusual speed, halted with a bang before the porch steps, and stepped quickly out.

"Hyar we are," he called cheerily, as he opened a side door. Then he proceeded to lift out numerous pieces of hand baggage, grips and bags of a quality and style seldom seen at Ryson.

The first passenger to alight was a very young girl, it seemed to Cal. Everybody on the porch stared. The girl, carrying a hand satchel, tripped up the steps. Cal caught a glimpse of blond curls and the flash of a white face and a rosy cheek. She went into the store. Cal, waiting for the next passenger, made ready to go forward and do his duty. But no one else alighted. Jake lifted out some more baggage, then proceeded to untie sacks from the running-board.

Cal stared. Suddenly he realized that the stage was empty. There were no more passengers. His first sensation was one of unutterable relief. Miss Stockwell's sister had not come. She had missed the stage or had not come at all. Anyway, she was not there. The joke would be on the boys. He glanced away from the stage to the porch.

What had happened to that outfit? Wess looked dazed; Panhandle was in a trance; Tim stared open-mouthed at the wide door of the store; and Arizona was fussing with his hair, then his scarf. He changed his gloves from one hand to another, and began to walk toward the door in the most hesitating manner.

But he never reached it. He was halted by a vision of youth and beauty that emerged from the doorway. She crossed the threshold, came out on the porch in the light. It seemed to Cal that everyone was struck as he was struck—incapable of movement.

The girl he had imagined a child, now facing him, was certainly a young lady. She had big violet eyes that peered expectantly all around her. Her face was white except for a rosy color high on her cheeks. Her lips were red as carmine. She wore a tan-colored dress, stylishly cut and strangely short. It reached only to the turn of her knees. Cal's quick bewildered glance caught a glimpse of slender, shapely, black-stockinged legs before it flashed back to her face.

"Mr. Driver, you said there was someone to meet me," she spoke up, in a sweet, high-pitched voice.

"Shore thar is, judgin' from appearances," laughed Jake, looking up from his task with the mailbags.

She did not appear in the least embarrassed or concerned in any way, except somewhat curious and interested.

Then Hatfield came out of the store, his handsome bold face pleasantly alight.

"Miss, I reckon you're the young lady I'm lookin' for," he said easily, as he towered over her.

"I'm Miss Georgiana May Stockwell," she said, with a flashing look.

Cal Thurman's strained attention broke. He fell back against the seat of the car. "By Heaven!" he whispered. He could only sit there and stare and listen.

"Come over to the garage with me an' I'll put you in a car," said Hatfield, and gathering up several of her bags he started down the porch steps.

"Thank you—I'll wait here," replied the young lady hesitatingly, and she watched him depart. Then Wess Thurman stepped forward to address her.

"Miss Stockwell," he began, with an earnestness that precluded embarrassment, "shore if you go with Bid Hatfield you'll never be welcome at the Thurman ranch."

She stared up at the tall lean-faced rider, and it was plain now that something seemed wrong to her.

"What am I up against?" she queried tartly. "How do I know who Bid Hatfield is? He said he was looking for me. I took him to be Mr. Cal Thurman."

"Wal, you're shore mistaken, an' Cal won't be flattered," replied the rider. "I'm Wess Thurman, an' we—us heah—thet is I—I come to meet you an' take you to your sister."

Miss Georgiana eyed Wess dubiously. "I was told down the road that Mr. Cal Thurman telephoned he would meet me," she said. "Where is he?"

"Wal, miss—you see," floundered Wess, trying to arise to his opportunity, "Cal's only a boy—an' he was takin' a lot on himself. Now I'm a-goin' to take you out to Green Valley Ranch."

"You are very kind," replied Georgiana sweetly. "Did my sister Mary send you to meet me?"

"Wal, I reckon—not jest that—but we—the boys—I mean I said I'd shore see you home safe," replied Wess, swallowing hard.

Miss Georgiana gazed roguishly up at him, and then at Arizona, who was edging closer, and then at Panhandle and Tim Matthews, now showing signs of animation.

"We fetched the—big car," said Arizona breathlessly.

"We! Oh, I'm to have several escorts,"

responded Georgiana demurely, as she gazed up at them.

"Shore we-all came to escort you," put in Tim.

"Lady, you're a-goin' with the right outfit," said Panhandle.

"Outfit! Oh, then you belong to the Four T's—at the Thurman ranch where my sister lives?" cried Georgiana eagerly.

"Wal, miss, you shore hit it on the haid," drawled Wess, with his engaging smile. "This heah is Arizona, who ain't got any other name. An' this's Panhandle Ames, an' heah's Tim Matthews."

Georgiana gave all in turn her hand, and a look that further marked their utter demoralization.

"And Mr. Cal Thurman—where is he?" she queried.

"Reckon Cal didn't want to bother aboot meeting' you, lady," said Tim blandly. "Last night he beefed a lot. He was heah when the stage come in, an' I guess he beat it."

"Oh, I see," replied the girl. "I'm sorry if my coming has annoyed anyone."

"Wal, it didn't annoy anyone but Cal, I'll swear to thet," answered Tim. His comrades laughed at this.

That was all the byplay Cal heard, for his attention was attracted by sight of Hatfield returning from the garage with a hired car. During the amazing and preposterous stand made by Wess and the boys in their endeavor to work this situation to their pleasure Cal had recovered from his consternation. He drew a deep breath and leaped out of the car.

When Hatfield halted at the porch Cal deliberately looked into the car, and seeing Miss Stockwell's bags, he promptly lifted them out. Hatfield swagged out of his seat.

"Hey, Thurman, what're you up to?"

"Bid, I'm relievin' you of Miss Stockwell's baggage," said Cal coolly. "I was sent to meet her an' I'm goin' to take her home."

Hatfield's muscular body jerked with a start of angry passion. "Well, Cal, you didn't show up an' nobody else in your outfit had any manners, so I offered to escort Miss Stockwell," he said.

Whereupon Hatfield mounted the porch, and with a gallant bow he faced the girl.

"Miss Stockwell, will you let me take you to your sister or do you prefer to go with Thurman?" he inquired courteously.

The girl turned her flashing gaze upon Cal. Suddenly, it seemed, as he felt her glance take him in, all his assurance and sense of right in the situation oozed away. He wore his old rider's clothes, and never had they seemed so dirty and ragged as now. What a sorry figure he must cut in contrast to this handsome Hatfield, or the boys who had put on their best for the occasion. Cal felt the blood rise to his temples.

"Mr. Bid Hatfield, if it were a matter of choice, I'd much rather go with you," replied the girl sweetly. "But as my sister sent him to get me I can only—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Cal curtly. "I'm glad to get out of takin' you. But I advise you to go with my cousin Wess. For if you go with Hatfield you will not be welcome at Green Valley. I'm tellin' you this for your sister's sake."

Cal turned away. At this juncture someone shouted from the store, "Cal Thurman, you're wanted on the phone."

Cal plodded up the steps and into the store, looking neither right nor left. He was aware of footsteps following

him in, but he was too miserable to take any further notice of anyone.

"Hello!" he called into the telephone.

"Hello! Is that you, Cal?" was the eager reply.

"Yes, it's me."

"This is Mary Stockwell talking. Cal, has the stage come with my sister?"

"I reckon so," replied Cal grimly.

"Oh—hurry, Cal! Fetch her out. I'm wild to see her. And, Cal, you're glad now I made you go, aren't you? You'll forgive me for fooling you—about the picture?"

"I'll never forgive you—never," blurted out Cal.

"Why, Cal—you don't mean that! It was only fun. You've played jokes on me. And I thought this would please you. It was fine of you, Cal. Why are you offended—why won't you forgive me?"

"Aw, because I've been made a damn fool before a crowd," replied Cal. "Wess an' the boys came in to play some low-down trick on me. I was look-in' for—for the person who'd look like the picture you showed me. An' when a—a pretty kid of a girl hops out of the stage I—I never thought it might be your sister. I was the last to find that out. Then—someone I've no use for went up to her—an' when I woke up an' introduced myself—said you'd sent me to meet her—then—then she insulted me right before him—an' all the crowd."

"Insulted you! Oh, Cal, don't say that," returned Miss Stockwell, in distress. "I'm sorry, Cal. Why, I wanted you to be the lucky boy. Tell me, who went up to Georgiana? Was it Bid Hatfield?"

"Yes, it was, an' she told him she'd prefer to go with him. Right before Wess an' the boys an' everybody! I've told her she'd better go home with

Wess—that if she goes with Hatfield it might make bad feelin' for you."

"Cal, my sister is coming home with you," declared Miss Stockwell. "Call her to the phone."

Thus admonished, Cal turned away, smarting and tingling from the forced expression of his feelings. He almost bumped into Georgiana, who evidently had been standing there.

"Your sister wants to speak to you," said Cal, motioning toward the telephone.

The girl ran, and snatching up the receiver, she stood on her tiptoes. "Hello—hello! This is Georgie . . . Yes! Yes! Oh, Mary—sister—I'm wild with joy! I'm here—out West—will see you soon. I've so much to tell you—and presents from Mother—everybody."

Cal felt a singular break in his abject misery, and it came through the sweet, low, broken voice of the girl.

"Yes, Mary, I hear you—I'll listen," went on the girl eagerly. At that Cal halted, half turned, and watched the slender form strained up before the telephone. He heard the squeaking of the voice coming over the wire and it seemed to be direct, forceful speech.

Miss Georgiana started. "Oh, Mary!" she expostulated appealingly. Then she became perfectly motionless, intent, and absorbed. Then she spoke again, evidently under different stress. "Mary dear, I'm afraid I've been rude, ungracious, to Mr. Thurman. But when I explain you won't think so badly of me . . . Yes, I will start at once and with him—if he'll take me now. Good-by."

She hung up the receiver and stood a moment longer, ponderingly. Then she wheeled swiftly and almost ran up to Cal.

"Mr. Cal," she began, "sister has explained—about my aunt's picture—how

your brothers and cousins refused to meet me—that you alone were kind enough—good enough to come. That those boys had framed up some trick to play on you . . . I apologize for what I said. I'm ashamed. Won't you forgive me—and take me to Mary?"

She had seemed to come closer all the time she was speaking, until her appealing hand touched his arm. She lifted her face that suddenly became beautiful and sweet in Cal's dawning sight. Her violet eyes held him.

After that nothing was clear. The sweet face floated before him, hazily, the face of a dream. He spoke, trying to tell her he would be glad to take her home. Then—proudest moment he had ever known—she was holding his arm, walking beside him out of the door, head erect, looking up at him, seeing none of the gaping bystanders, gliding so coolly and disdainfully past Wess and his comrades, oblivious of the crest-fallen Hatfield—down the steps and out to the car. There Cal became again possessed of some semblance of rationality.

"May I ride in front beside you?" she asked, as if that was what she most wanted to do of all things in the world.

"Sure can," replied Cal, trying to catch his breath. "I'll pack your bags in back."

At this juncture Tuck Merry loomed up, carrying his canvas bag. His cadaverous face did not betray that he and Cal had met.

"Buddy, would you give a fellow a lift along the road?" he inquired.

"Sure. Pile in with your pack," replied Cal heartily.

Merry and his pack and the girl's numerous pieces of baggage comfortably filled the after section of the Ford. Then Cal cranked the engine. It start-

ed with a strange sound, entirely foreign to him. Was it only the confusion of his brain? Anyway, it started. Cal climbed in beside the girl, tremendously aware of her presence, of her perfect self-possession and poise, of the smile that enveloped him. His hands shook a little. Then when he tried to drive off he was dumbfounded to see that the car would not budge an inch. The engine had stopped.

CHAPTER FOUR

Tuck Does His Stuff

SITTING there at the wheel, suddenly realizing that what he had anticipated had begun to happen, Cal swore under his breath.

"You stalled the engine," Georgiana said brightly, looking at him.

In low tone he said, "Your sister told you Wess an' his gang had put up a job on me, didn't she?"

"Yes. That's one reason why I was so ashamed."

"I've got a hunch they've fooled with the engine when I left the car at the garage," whispered Cal. "It's sure comin' to me. An' it's hardly fair to ask you to stick by me. But I'm askin' you to. It's started bad for me, but will you stick to me an' be game?"

"Game is my middle name," she whispered back, with a flash of fun and fire in her eyes. "I'll stick if we have to walk. Don't worry about me. This's great. You keep *your* nerve and we'll give them the merry ha-ha."

Cal seemed suddenly to acquire an exalted strength, a something which welled up out of his new-born emotion.

"Reckon I'd better confess I'm no

mechanic. I don't know an engine from a fence post," he said.

Her low laugh was cut short by Wess Thurman drawling out, "Wal, Cal, do you want a team of hosses?"

Tim Matthews sauntered down the porch steps with nonchalant confidence. "Mebbe yore out of gas," he said.

Wess Thurman strode down off the porch and to the car. "Cousin," he drawled, "I reckon you want Miss Stockwell to get home for dinner?"

"Sure. An' I'll get her there," returned Cal.

"Wal, not in thet vehicle, you won't," averred Wess. "We've got room in the big car for her an' her packs."

"How about me?" inquired Cal with sarcasm.

"Wal, there won't be room, Cal," replied Wess, spreading wide his hands.

Georgiana was studying them wonderingly, as if fascinated. Then Tuck Merry unlimbered his long length out of the back of the car. Cal had forgotten his other passenger.

"Buddy, let me give this can the once-over," he said. "I used to run a cheese-cutter for the Smith Condensed Milk Company."

Wess and his comrades watched him with undisguised amazement. Tuck leisurely went round to the front of the car and threw back the cover of the engine, and craning his long neck he bent his head clear out of sight. He was whistling. Then he straightened up to look over and handle parts of the engine. He rattled things. He turned this and that, with the air of a master mechanic.

"Haw! Haw!" roared the cattleman Bloom from his post on the porch. "Shore this's a sideshow."

Merry went on leisurely examining the engine.

"I don't know what's comin' off, but I've a hunch," Cal whispered to the girl.

Finally Merry straightened up, and with his hand on the machine, stood in the posture of an orator about to speak.

"Buddy, this here engine has been monkeyed with by someone who doesn't know the combination," he said blandly. "The carburetor has been detached from the ventriculator and the trolley wire is off. The ignition system has been jammed in the midriff. Then the juice no longer coincides with the perambulator, and as a consequence the spark plug is nix. Outside of that the engine is all right."

"Gee! Isn't there anythin' more out of whack?" asked Cal, almost bursting with glee. His hand had dropped to the seat and the girl, in her excitement was squeezing it.

"That's all I can see offhand," replied Tuck, "except some parts are missin'. But I can make her run, all right, all right."

"Say, stranger, are you tryin' to josh me?" Wess queried, with a note of resentment in his drawl.

"I was addressing myself to the gentleman who offered me a ride," replied Tuck, waving a huge hand at Cal.

"Wal, what'd you mean by thet crack aboot someone monkeyin' with this car?"

"Mister, I meant what I said. Somebody has monkeyed with it."

"Ahuh! Wal, I'm tellin' you thet strangers in these parts better be careful what they say," declared Wess beligerently.

"Oh, I see," replied Merry, almost abjectly. "I didn't mean any offense—just telling the truth that way."

"Who'n hell are you, anyhow?" inquired Wess, curious, now that he had apparently intimidated the fellow.

"My name's Merry and I'm looking for a job."

"Wal, reckon you'd make some apple-picker, but it ain't a good year for apples."

With that Wess dropped back beside Cal and resumed his genial air and slow drawl. "Wal, kid, I'll relieve you of Miss Stockwell an' get her home for dinner."

"Wess, I'd hate to tell you what I know," said Cal with mysterious good nature.

"Aw, now would you?" queried the other banteringly. Then his keen eyes saw Cal's hand over Georgiana's and he actually gave a start.

"Wal, takin' all in all, you ain't so slow," he said. "But considerin' thet Miss Stockwell must be got home, I'll have to tag you. Shore it's a cinch you cain't take her in this wagon."

Whereupon he strode off toward the garage. Arizona and Panhandle hurried after him, but Tim lagged behind long enough to shoot a hard look at Tuck Merry and a languishing glance at Miss Stockwell.

Merry bent over the machinery, dexterously using his big hands, while the bystanders stirred and shuffled on the porch. Cal caught the eyes of Bloom and Hatfield upon him and the girl.

"Holdin' hands, heh?" queried Bloom coarsely, in his loud voice, that instantly called attention to Cal and Georgiana.

Cal blushed and withdrew the hand that had unconsciously covered hers. Merry jerked up quickly from his task over the engine. Bloom must have seen or felt contempt in the girl's utter lack of embarrassment or shame.

"Wal, Bid," he said, just as loudly, turning to Hatfield. "Thet chicken is

some looker, but you ain't missin' so much. Funny about these Eastern females—"

"*Shut up!*" yelled Tuck Merry, and moved toward the porch.

Cal, in a furious anger, strove to get out of the car. But the girl held him.

"Please—don't—don't— It was my fault," she whispered pleadingly. "Don't let me start a fight the very first thing."

Cal saw that Merry had taken the matter in hand, and suddenly he relaxed to sink back in the car. Georgiana still clung to him.

"What'n hell's eatin' you?" demanded Bloom, striding to the porch steps to confront Merry.

"I'm a stranger out here," said Merry, mounting the steps. "I'm from the East and I don't take kindly to the remark you made. Do Arizona men talk that way about Eastern women?"

"They shore do when them wimmen have painted faces an' bare knees like thet girl," declared Bloom.

"But, mister, down East a little artificial color and a short skirt don't call for insults," averred Merry gravely. "It's the style. I've a kid sister who wears the same."

"Wal, you an' your sister an' all sech as thet chicken had better stay where you belong," said Bloom. "The West won't stand for you."

"Mister, I've met a lot of men, and I'll say no real man anywhere talks like you."

"Say, you starved-lookin' bag of bones!" roared Bloom furiously. "Do you hev any idee who yore ravin' at?"

"I'm tellin' you, mister," replied Merry. "You're no real Westerner. You're a poor fish. You're a big fat stiff—a blow-hard, a bully. I'll bet you're yellow clear to your gizzard."

Bloom appeared suddenly bereft of reason. His face turned livid, and he stuttered like a lunatic. With a slow, ponderous motion he swung back his arm.

Then Merry's right hand shot up so swiftly that Cal could not follow it. But he saw the result. Merry's fist stopped at Bloom's nose—not a hard blow, but evidently peculiarly placed. Bloom's head jerked back, and blood squirted from his nose. He let out a hoarse cry of pain. Then as he steadied himself on his feet Merry's left hand shot out. It hit Bloom in the waist somewhere and sounded like a bass drum: Bloom gave a terrible gasp. His mouth opened wide, and his whole face became a network of strained wrinkles. His hands fluttered to his body and he began to sink down. The breath had been expelled from him. Then as he was sagging Merry knocked him in a heap to the porch floor.

"Where's that swell motion-picture pard of his?" inquired Merry, of the bystanders.

"Keep clear of me or I'll throw a gun," declared Hatfield threateningly, moving back into the store.

"Say, you wouldn't throw anything but a bluff," retorted Merry, striding across the porch.

One of the men barred his way. "Stranger, let well enough alone. Bid might throw a gun at thet. An' seein' you ain't packin' any it's wiser to hold in. Don't ever run after any fights in the Tonto. They'll come to you fast enough."

Thus admonished, Merry turned away and went back to the car. Meanwhile the bystanders had crowded round the prostrate Bloom, and Wess, with his comrades, had arrived in the big car. Cal sat perfectly still. The girl was cling-

ing to him, and still clung even when Wess leaped out of his car and jumped to accost Cal.

"Boy, what's come off?" he demanded sharply.

"Wess, it isn't anythin' to get riled at, but I'd given a great deal if you'd seen it. Bloom made an insultin' remark about Eastern girls, an' Merry soaked him. That's all."

"Wal, I'll be gosh-durned!" ejaculated Wess. "Thet queer-lookin' jasper! Reckon he throwed a hammer or wrench, huh?"

Just then the circle of bystanders round Bloom opened to show several of them assisting him to his feet.

"Say—fellers—what'd—I—run ag'in'?" he panted.

"Wal, Bloom, we calkilate you got hit," replied one of the men.

"Aw!—I'm damn—near killed. What'd he—hit—me with?"

Merry raised his long lean figure up to its full height. "You big fat baboon!" he called out derisively. "I only slapped you."

Bloom wrestled with those who held him, but not very effectively, as he evidently was weak.

"I'll get—you!" he cried hoarsely, as the men dragged him into the store.

Very curiously then Wess Thurman strode up to Merry, and after him came Arizona and Panhandle, unquestionably friendly. Wess looked Merry up and down intently, wonderingly.

"Say, what'd you sling at him?" asked Wess, at last.

Merry paid no heed to Wess and went on working over the engine until suddenly it started.

"Wal," continued Wess. "Reckon it's no matter what you throwed. But that made you a friend of the Four T's. Savvy? Put her there!"

He shoved out his hand, and Merry grasped it and gave it a single crunch.

"Wow!" yelled Wess, jerking his hand loose. "Man, I was aimin' to be agreeable. Shore I didn't give my hand to a corn-huskin' machine." Dubiously he regarded Merry, smoothing out his hand the while.

"Cal, see heah," he said, turning; "you'd better let the little lady go home with me."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Thurman; you're very kind indeed," interposed Georgiana demurely, "but I'm going with Mr. Cal."

"Wal, you might have to walk," rejoined Wess, rather gruffly.

"That would be lovely. I adore walking."

Wess, with a meaning glance at the rattling Ford strode back to the touring-car. Arizona, however, bent over the door close to Georgiana, and with great seriousness he said:

"Lady, shore this's the wust season for walkin'."

"Indeed! Why, how strange! The weather seems delightful to me," she replied, smiling at him.

"Wal, miss, the weather hasn't nuthin' to do with walkin' in the Tonto," went on Arizona. "Now, my hunch is jest this heah. Shore Cal's old Ford is palpitatin' yet. But it's dyin' an' it'll croak pronto. Ther'll be aboot dark, I reckon, mebbe before. You'll hev to hoof it. You'd better hedge on thet walk for hours an' hours along the lonely road—in the dark woods—an' come with us. I'll see you safe in Green Valley."

"I'll take a chance on Mr. Cal," returned Georgiana archly.

"Aw!" breathed Arizona, in disappointment. "Cal, you ought to be ashamed—draggin' this nice little gurl, with

all her pretty clothes, to go trampin' through the dust an' woods."

"Arizona, it takes a long time for anythin' new to penetrate your skull," replied Cal. "Miss Georgiana Stockwell *wants* to go home with me—Jump in, Tuck. Ha! Ha!"

Merry climbed into the back seat and slammed the door. Cal, with deep and secret misgivings, put on the power, half expecting that the car would refuse to move. But to his delight it started off as if running smoothly was its especial forte.

"Say, Cal," yelled Arizona, "we'll hang along behind an' pick up the pieces."

Cal drove by Wess and Panhandle and Tim, on past the garage, where the mechanics peeped out in sure betrayal of their part in the plot, and down the dusty road out of the village into the country.

He felt keen, light, buoyant, and yet word shy. He wanted to look at the girl, but could not yet compel himself to do so. A glamour floated over the valley, not all the rosy veils and golden glints of the westering sun.

The girl sat quietly for the first mile or so of that journey. Cal saw out of the corner of his eye how still and thoughtful she appeared. He noticed when she began to take interest in the ride and in him. Presently she turned to address Merry.

"Mr. Merry, thanks for—for defendin' Eastern girls," she said hesitatingly. "That boob was horrid and just what you called him. I never saw any one hit as you hit him. I'll say you handed him one."

"Don't mention it," replied Tuck gallantly. "I'm a ladies' man. And I've a little sister just like you, only not so pretty."

"Thank you. So you're a flatterer as well as a slugger," she said merrily. "Mr. Cal, what do you think about it?"

"Please don't call me Mister," replied Cal. "What do I think about Tuck? Aw, great! If only Enoch could have seen that!"

"Who's Enoch?" asked the girl.

"My older^a brother. He's the finest fellow. He an' Bloom are set against each other something bad. An' we all side with Enoch. Bloom is no good, an' that showy rider of his, Bid Hatfield—"

Cal checked his impulsive speech. An utterly new sensation—the fire of jealousy—gripped him.

"Did you like Hatfield's looks?"

"Oh, indeed I did! Looked like a swell movie actor to me," she replied naively.

Cal's beautiful trance suffered a darkening blight. If he had never before had reason to hate Hatfield he had it now.

"Well, Eastern girls are no different from Western girls, so far as Bid Hatfield is concerned," said Cal, compelled to a caustic sincerity. "Sure the Tonto girls fall for him."

"Sort of a man vamp," giggled Georgiana.

Cal had no reply for this. He began to drive faster.

"Step on it!" cried the girl gaily. "You can't scare me. I eat speed."

Cal answered to that with reckless abandon until Merry reached forward and, tapping him on the shoulder, said, "Buddy, cut the speed or you'll spill us. And that big car with your cousin and his pards is right behind us."



Thus brought to his senses, Cal slowed down to careful driving. He tried not to be aware of Miss Georgiana's distracting nearness, but the fact that a lurch of the car had thrown her against him, and she had not shown any special desire to move away, utterly defeated his efforts.

Once he looked back down a long straight stretch of road. The big Thurman car with Wess and the boys was hanging back there. Cal was grimly reminded of the fact that they were driving slowly, waiting behind him for the inevitable disaster, whatever it was to be.

"Cal, this limousine seems to be holding together," she said presently.

"Yes. Did you expect it'd fall apart?"

"Oh, what beautiful country!" she exclaimed, when Cal turned the last curve of the valley road and headed into the foothills.

"Beautiful isn't strong enough, Miss Georgiana. It's glorious. You just wait."

"Can the 'Miss', will you? I'm not an old lady. I'm only seventeen. Call me Georgiana."

The sun was about to go down behind the ragged golden-hazed range of mountains in the west, and the most lovely moment of the day was at hand.

Cal yielded to an uncontrollable impulse. On the summit of the foothills he stopped the car and bade Georgiana look around. She uttered a little cry.

The green rolling valley waved away to the Mazatzals, blue-massed, gold-tipped, marvelously canopied in a purple haze. Long dark green slopes lifted for leagues and leagues onward, to the noble brow of the Mogollon Rim, where blazed the last fire of the sun.

Close at hand the foothills presented soft rounded contours of green brush and yellow earth alternating in

patches. Cal pointed out to the girl the manzanita, with its smooth red-barked branches, its glistening green leaves, like wax, its gold-hued berries. He showed her the mescal cactus plants, gray-green, with spiked leaves, and long dead flower-stems, standing aloft. To the eastward rose the foothills, higher and higher, growing green and dark with cedar, juniper, and at last the pines, all mounting in sloping billows to a great dominating landmark, a flat-topped, black-fringed mountain called Promontory Point, standing out from the Rim to catch the last glittering rose and gold of the sunset. To the southward the country fell away into the numberless dark shadowy lines of ridges and canyons that constituted the Tonto Basin, and at this bewitching moment all was bathed in a strangely beautiful and unreal light, purple and lilac, exquisite and intangible as the shadow cast by a rose.

"You love it all—don't you?" she said, as Cal ended his enthusiastic designation of the country visible to them.

"Yes," he replied, drawing a deep breath.

"Oh, it's nifty, all right," she replied, settling back in her seat, "but too wild and woolly for me. I went to New York once, and there's the place for me."

"Ahuh! I don't doubt it," replied Cal, rather bluntly, in his disappointment. Then, as if to find solace for his hurt he turned to Merry. "Tuck, do you like it?"

"Buddy, here's where I homestead," was the hearty reply. "I've been all over the world. But this Tonto has got 'em all skinned to death. I want to live here a hundred years and bury four wives."

Cal joined with Georgiana in mirth at Merry's facetiousness. Then the

hoarse honk of an automobile horn hastened Cal to start on again. Wess was creeping up on him. Cal drove on, down the winding slope of that foothill and up another, toward the dense green wooded country rolling eastward.

"I'm nearly—frozen," said the girl presently.

"That's too bad. I forgot to fetch a robe. Haven't you a coat?"

"Yes, I've a heavy coat, and sweater, too, but I can't unpack them now," she replied. She was shivering. With the setting of the sun and growing altitude the air had become cold.

For the first time Cal deliberately ran his glance over her from head to foot. Indeed, the light, flimsy dress she wore, low at the neck and startlingly short, was no garment for the Tonto at night. A girl needed to wear wool. Cal's quick glance caught a glimpse of her bare knees, shapely, slim, and pink, and her black stockings rolled low.

"If you—you suffer from cold—why don't you dress differently?" he queried in a tone he meant to be casual.

"Don't you like this dress?" she asked quickly.

"I should smile I don't," he replied.

"What's wrong with it? It's new—stylish. All the boys said it was swell."

"Boys!" retorted Cal. "What kind of boys?"

"Why, all my friends!" she replied, in a dangerous tone that warned him. "What's wrong with it? I suppose you're the arbiter of style in your wonderful Tonto."

"I don't know anything about style," said Cal. "But I've got some sense. This is a mountain country. You're six thousand feet above sea level right here, and going higher. You'll freeze to death

in that—that thing. It's too thin—and too low—and a mile too short."

"How'd I know I was going up into the mountains where it's winter in summer? But if I had known I'd have worn the same, only I'd had my coat out. Mister Thurman, it may interest you to learn that last winter all the fashionable women wore skirts almost to their knees and open-work lace or silk stockings and slippers. There! Do you get that, Mister Backwoodsman?"

"Well, they're loco," declared Cal shortly. "Plumb loco—an' that means crazy, Miss New York."

"I think you're horrid," she retorted hotly. "It's strange my sister is so fond of you. I wish I had come with Mr. Bid Hatfield."

Cal felt the blood flame and sting his face. What a little cat she was! He thought he hated her then.

"Ahuh! Thank you. That's two speeches of yours I'm not likely to forget," he flashed back at her. "An' if you had come with Hatfield you'd have learned what *he* thought of your rolled-down stockings."

"Is that straight talk or just temper?" she asked quietly. "Is it square to Mr. Hatfield?"

"Yes, it's straight an' it's square. I could tell you a lot, but all I'll say is, Hatfield once insulted my sister. Reckon I'll kill him some day."

That gave her a slight start and she turned sharply, with lips parted. Nevertheless, she did not reply. Presently she relapsed into pondering thought.

"I ought to apologize for—for talkin' familiarly about a lady's way of dressin'," added Cal with finality. "But I'd never have done so if you hadn't said you were freezin'."

What her reply might have been Cal never knew, for as she turned to him

the engine emitted a grinding bang from its internals, the wheel turned out of his grasp, and the car ran into a bank.

The girl was thrown violently against Cal. She did not cry out. There was a sound of breaking glass, and of the baggage shifting in the back of the car.

"Buddy, we struck a hard wave," cheerfully called out Merry.

"That'll be about all," added Georgiana.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Everything That Wears Pants"

MISS GEORGIANA, are you hurt?" queried Cal, suddenly aware of the little head pressing rather heavily against

his shoulders.

"I—I don't think—so," she replied, somewhat tremulously. "Sort of a—jerk—my neck—like the game crack-the-whip—you know."

"Aw, I'm sorry," said Cal. Her hat was touching his face, her cheek rested upon his shoulder and then slid a little lower. He raised his arm round her, more, he thought, to get it out of her way than anything else. Yet when the slim form seemed to sink a little more, now closer to him, he experienced a comforting sense of strength, of his power to sustain her.

"Miss—Stockwell," he broke out, "are you—sure you're not hurt? Please don't faint."

"I'll be all right—in a minute," she replied, her voice muffled against him.

"Tuck, I'm afraid she's hurt," said Cal fearfully. "What'll we do?"

"Buddy, she can't be hurt bad," replied Tuck as he jumped out of the

car and then leaned forward to look at Georgiana. "I guess you're doing about all that's necessary," he continued. "Just hold her, Buddy, till she comes to. I hear the other car. It'll be along soon."

At that the girl stirred, sat up, and moved away from Cal. That relieved his anxiety.

"You're a couple of bright guys," she said.

Merry let out a hearty laugh at this, but Cal could only stare at her.

"Bright guys?" he echoed. "Why do you say that?"

"I ought to say more. You drove like a soused chauffeur. And your Tuck Merry lets me freeze to death when he's got a bundle of blankets or clothes."

"Right-o," declared Tuck with alacrity. "Bonehead is the correct allegation for this member of the party." Whereupon he reached for his pack, and swiftly unrolling it he took out a blanket. "Let me tuck this round you."

"Thanks, Tuck. You're well named," said this amazing girl as presently she leaned back wrapped from head to feet in the blanket. "Now where do we go from here?"

Cal sat there silently looking at her, and finally forced his gaze away. Just then the big touring-car with Wess and the boys mounted the last bench of the hill behind, and came humming to a stop opposite the Ford.

"Wal, heah you are," called Wess peevishly. "It shore took you a long time to ditch thet Ford."

"Say heah, you long-legged galoot," called Tim Matthews to Merry, who was now examining the engine. "Is she busted—laid out—hamstrung?"

"Mister, do you mean this Ford or the young lady?" calmly queried Tuck.

"So you run into thet bank?" added

Wess, more cheerfully, as he lumberingly got his long length out of the touring-car. "Broke down for good, hey?"

They all got out, leisurely, and swaggered toward the Ford. Twilight had deepened, so their faces could not be clearly seen. Meanwhile Cal had been pondering how best to meet the situation. Impulsively he leaned close to the girl so he could whisper in her ear. "They've been mean an' they've got it on me. So won't you please be—be nice an' forget all I said—an' stand by me? I can beat them yet."

"Go to it. I'll play up to your game," she whispered back.

"Wal, Cal, why don't you come down off your hoss?" drawled Wess.

"Cousin, get your laugh off your chest quick," replied Cal, loud and clear. "I knew you'd tampered with the engine."

"You did? All the time? Wal, I'll be gol-durned. Boys, you heah Cal? He says he knew all the time. Haw! Haw! Haw!" His comrades joined in his mirth. Tim Matthews recovered first.

"Cal—if you're—ever a-goin'—to lick me—now's yore time—when I'm weaker'n a calf."

"Ahuh!" ejaculated Cal, at last. "You feel better now, I reckon. You've had your joke. Now listen. It turned out bad. You know I'm a poor driver, an' when somethin' busted in the engine it scared me—threw me off guard—an' we ran into this bank. Miss Georgiana got a hard jerk an' knock. She fainted twice. I'm afraid she's hurt—maybe bad."

A blank dead silence ensued. Then suddenly that silence was pierced by a little low moan of anguish.

"My Gawd! Cal, don't say the little lady's hurt," ejaculated Arizona.

"Don't stand there like a lot of boobs!" shouted Cal. "Clear out the back of your car, so I can carry her in there."

"It's done," added Wess sharply, "an you fellers are to blame. Rustle now."

Then he approached the Ford on the girl's side and opened the door. She lay back in the dark blanket, a singularly inert figure. Cal moved over close to Georgiana, and with every show of extreme tenderness he put his arms under her and lifted her. Another little moan escaped her.

"Of all the tough luck!" exclaimed Wess huskily. "Cal, you may beat me half to death. But honest to Gawd I didn't put up the job. It was Tim an' Panhandle. Let me help you—Easy now."

"There, I can manage," replied Cal as he straightened up free of the car. How light she was!

Silently the boys followed him—helped him into the big car, where he sat down to let Georgiana slip off his lap into the corner. But she still leaned against him.

"Cal, you'd better support her head," said Wess, assuming the authority here. "You know the road's bad in places. Boys, hustle in with them bags. An', say, you elongated stranger, stick your pack on the fender an' ride on the runnin'-board."

In a few moments all appeared to in readiness for the start. Tim and Panhandle squeezed into the front seat with Wess, and Arizona got into the back seat beside Cal.

Georgiana wailed out a most heart-rending cry. "Oh, Mister—Cal—to think any young men—could be so c-r-u-e-l!"

"Cal, hadn't we better rustle to Ryson—fer the doctor?" asked Wess hurriedly.

"Take me—to sister," she wailed. "I want to die—in her arms. My neck's broken—and no doctor could help me now. I need—minister to pray—for my soul—for I'm a very—very wicked girl. Oh—oh—ohhhh!"

She was giving Cal's free hand a sly squeeze at the very moment that she was wailing.

Never had Wess driven so wonderfully. Panhandle seemed set in a gloomy trance, while Tim Matthews might well have been a criminal on his way to be hanged. And the fun-loving and easy-going Arizona crouched on the seat beside Cal, and it was evident his heart was broken.

The night grew dark, and when the car hummed into the denser wooded section all was pitch-black except the narrow road ahead. Cal could hardly see the gleam of the girl's face against his shoulder. Whenever Wess slowed up at a bump or crossing or wash, Georgiana would utter a faint cry.

"Oh, Mister Cal," complained Georgiana in a most convincing sad little voice, "sister wrote me—about the beautiful West—how fine and noble and kind—all the Tonto boys. Oh, it was bunk—bunk—bunk!—Not *you*, Mister Cal—for *you're* wonderful—but that horrible cousin of yours—and his boob friends—they're devils. To frame up—a dirty job on—a poor little Eastern girl—who came West to get well and happy!"

"Never mind about them, Miss Stockwell," responded Cal. "They're really not responsible for what they do. If we had an asylum at Ryson my cousin would be in it. An' if we had a jail, Tim Matthews would be there. Never mind about them. They'll get *theirs*, all right! You just try to be quiet an' don't fret."

This talk seemed all very good, in the interest of their united efforts to annihilate the enemy; but a moment's thought convinced Cal that he had carried the thing far enough. Wess and the boys had been sufficiently punished. But at the moment when he was about to burst out into an uproarious laugh that would betray his counter-trick to the boys, the girl's soft, cold little hand slipped into his and she nestled closer to him.

Cal's breast heaved with his conflicting emotions, and that deep heave lifted the fragrant curly head closer to his lips. Desperately he controlled the longing to kiss those curls. He trembled as very slowly she slipped her head backward and tilted her face upward, closer, with a singular soft motion. And then with her head on his shoulder she became very quiet.

Cal's eyes pierced the darkness, and made out the pale oval of her face, the black depths of her eyes, the vague sweet mouth, indistinct, and all the more alluring for that. She was watching him, and he imagined she smiled. An instinct urged him to kiss the shadowy mouth. He knew he could do so—that she would not resent it. And that was why he did not yield. He was too earnest. He felt too greatly. Wherefore he turned his face away to look down the road, glad to see the twinkling lights of Green Valley Ranch.

The car passed the corral fences, the barns, the sheds, and stopped before the long, rambling ranch house, from which lighted windows gleamed.

Wess turned to say, anxiously, "Cal, how is she?"

"Reckon she's no worse," replied Cal.

"Lady—I—I do hope you're recovered," faltered Wess in solicitation.

"Thank you—I guess—I'm a little better," she said languidly. "The terrible pain—is gone—and I'm easier. I guess my neck's not broken, after all—Please forgive me—for all I said—back there."

"Wess, go in an' break the news to teacher, but mind you, don't scare her," said Cal.

"My Gawd! Cal—I cain't face Miss Mary an' tell her what we've done to her little sister. I cain't," replied Wess.

"Mister Cal—you go in, please—and tell sister," said Georgiana. "Lie to her. Say I'm just tired out—little weak and sick, you know. Then come back after me. I'm afraid I can't walk."

"I'll carry you," offered Wess.

"Oh no, thank you. Mister Cal knows just how to handle me," she replied graciously. "You can carry my baggage."

Cal slipped out, taking with him another lingering, encouraging pressure from that little hand. He ran into the house. The long living-room was bright with two lamps and blazing logs in the huge stone fireplace. Henry Thurman looked up from his paper.

"Wal, heah you be, Cal," he drawled, with a smile smoothing out the net of fine wrinkles in his massive face. Cal's mother and sister both called in unison from the kitchen that supper was burning.

"Come in here," answered Cal, and when they came in, happily expectant in their hospitality, Enoch, and Boyd also entered from the back porch. "Listen, folks, an' don't get scared, now. There's been a little accident. I must tell teacher. Then I'll fetch her sister in. Just wait an' don't be scared."

As Cal hurried out his father drawled, "What air thet boy up to?"

Miss Stockwell's room was at the far end of the south porch. Cal knocked

on the door and called. "Teacher, are you there?"

"Cal, is that you?" she replied, and opened the door.

"Teacher," whispered Cal, almost hilariously, "Georgiana an' I have put it all over Wess an' his outfit."

"You have? Oh, fine! Tell me. Where's Georgie? Is she all right?"

"Listen. I can't tell everythin' now," went on Cal breathlessly. "The boys tampered with the Ford. It broke down as they'd planned. Then we pretended Georgiana was hurt in the accident. But she wasn't, see. Wess, an' the boys are sick. Now your part is to pretend to be terribly angry when Wess comes in. See?"

"Yes, Cal, I'll do my part. But hurry," she replied.

"I'll send Wess an' his gang in first. You be there. You're supposed to think Georgiana is bad hurt an' that they did it. See! Then I'll fetch her in. Oh, say, it'll be great!"

With that Cal wheeled away, and leaping off the porch he ran round the house to the walk, and so out of the gate to the car. All the boys were standing there, dark, gloomy, waiting.

"Wess, go in an' take your medicine," ordered Cal solemnly. "Drag your pardners with you. Teacher is awful mad."

When the five young men, heavily laden, had filed through the gate, Cal whispered into the car.

"Come on now. We're sure goin' to have some fun. I fixed it up with your sister. She's on an' she'll do her part."

"I'm all wrapped up," complained the girl, stumbling as she stepped out on the running-board. "I'm supposed to be crippled, am I not? Do I have to walk?"

"Why—why—yes, sure, I—You can walk to the door. Then I'll carry you."

"Cal, you're a fairly good actor," she

said finally, "but when it comes to playing choosies in the dark you are certainly punk."

"Choosies!" ejaculated Cal. "What on earth are they?"

"Your education has been neglected. If I can get up the pep I'll have to take you in hand."

The door of the house opened, sent out a broad flare of light for a moment, and then closed.

"Come on," said Cal, again shot through with eagerness to see the climax of his joke.

Georgiana gathered up the folds of the blanket from round her feet, and followed him into the yard and down to the porch.

"Oh, listen," whispered Cal.

"... done to my little sister?" sounded the ringing voice of Miss Stockwell, in furious scorn and anger.

"Teacher, it was this heah way," came Wess's humble answer. "We busted Cal's car. But the durned fool run it into a bank. An' your sister was hurt. But so help me Gawd—"

"You villains!" burst out Miss Stockwell in terrible tones. "You miserable ruffians! It's bad enough of you to torment Cal, let alone hurt a poor little sick girl. It's outrageous. You've got to be horse-whipped. And if my sister dies I'll have you hanged!"

Georgiana squeezed Cal's arm. "Cal, here's where we put it over good. Now, you cover my face with the blanket and carry me in. Be very solemn and awfully grieved. Then set me down on my feet, and leave the rest to me."

Cal folded the end flap of the blanket over her face and took her in his arms.

"Open the door," he called in a hollow voice. It was opened wide by Tuck Merry.

In one sweeping glance, as Cal entered, he took in the assembly. His mother and sisters, white-aproned for the occasion, gazed at him and his burden in a perturbation wholly real. His old father cocked his head on one side and peered with infinite curiosity. But his slight smile precluded anxiety. Enoch and Boyd appeared dumbfounded. Miss Stockwell had the center of the room, with dark excited eyes shining wonderfully on Cal. In front of her, lined up as against a wall for execution, stood Wess and Panhandle and Arizona and Tim.

Without more ado Cal set Georgiana upon her feet and with one swift motion stripped the blanket from her. She might have been an apparition to most of these onlookers. Bareheaded, with golden curls disheveled, radiant of face, she rushed into her sister's outstretched arms.

"Oh, Mary—Mary—how glad I am!"

"Georgie, darling!" exclaimed the teacher, and she folded the girl close and bent to kiss her again and again.

Cal glanced away to take a look at the four culprits. Then he tasted revenge sweet and full. They stared with jaws dropping.

Suddenly then Georgiana turned in her sister's arms, and with the lamp-light upon her softened, glowing face, her eyes flashing purple, and a dimpled smile breaking on her cheek, she seemed the loveliest creature Cal had ever seen.

"Mr. Cal, we put it over on them, didn't we?" she cried joyously.

Cal could only stare at her. As he gazed the truth flashed upon him. He had fallen in love with her.

"Aw!" burst from Wess—a huge expulsion of breath indicating realization and relief.

"Miss—Miss—ain't you hurted at all?" gasped Arizona, beginning to beam.

"I wasn't hurt," she said sweetly. "We were just fooling you."

Cal ate at the second table that night with the boys and Tuck Merry, and afterward he avoided the living-room where his father and Enoch continued the merriment that had been precipitated. He took Merry to his little bunk-house, and made him comfortable there.

"Tuck, you can bunk with me until we fix up a place for you."

"Fine and dandy," returned Tuck. "Buddy, I hope you won't wake me out of this dream.—Did you see me stuff myself? Talk about your luck. I've gotten soft.—Cal, I like your folks. Your dad made a hit with me. And how he did lam it into your cousin Wess. Funny! You Tonto folks get a lot of kick out of jokes."

"I'm afraid we run it into the ground sometimes," replied Cal soberly.

"I suppose you scrap the same way?"

"Scrap! Why Tuck, fightin' is about as common as ridin' horses. But at that most of it is fun—among our own outfit."

"And I'm to be one of the Thurman 4's, hey?"

"You bet. Father was plumb glad I'd got you. An' say, Tuck, when he sees you slug some of these fresh riders—whoopee!"

"Buddy, with all respect to your hopes, I'd like to make friends with the boys first."

"Tuck, you'll never make friends until *after* you've licked them. Just leave it to me. An' when I give you the wink do the same as you did to Bloom."

"Right-o. And tomorrow let me begin your boxing lessons."

"I should smile," responded Cal.

"Buddy, you certainly put it over on

those boneheads. That kid Georgiana is a wonder. Don't you think so?"

"Tuck, I don't know what I think," replied Cal, dropping his head.

"Buddy, I saw how you fell for her," continued Tuck earnestly. "So did I. So did Wess and his gang. So'll everything that wears pants, my boy."

CHAPTER SIX

"Are You on My Side?"

MISS STOCKWELL was reflecting that she had come to dread Sundays, where formerly they had been welcome days of rest from her school duties. The cause was Georgiana. Never in her life had a three weeks' period been so filled with love, bewilderment, distress, and fear. And on this quiet Sabbath morning, while Georgiana was making up the hours of sleep she had lost, Miss Stockwell undertook to unravel the chaos of the situation.

Judged superficially, Georgiana had appeared to be a very lively and pretty young girl, bringing with her the clothes, habits, and tricks of speech of the East, and she had not been understood. The young men of the Tonto had been drawn to her as bees to honey. To them she was a new species of female, strange, alluring, irresistible. To the young girls she had been a revelation, a wonderful creature heralding independence. They had already begun to ape her dress, her manner, her slang, even to the bobbing of their hair. The matter bade fair to upset the tranquil Tonto. To the older women Georgiana was a girl beyond their understanding, a menace and an intruder.

To Miss Stockwell this little sister was adorable despite all that could be said against her, and that was an exceeding great deal. As long as Georgiana was loved, petted, and given her own way she was sweet, lovable, absolutely a comfort and a joy. But cross her in the slightest and she was another creature. And it was impossible to keep from crossing her because Georgiana was endlessly thinking of something never before heard of in the Tonto.

It distressed Miss Stockwell. She had either to change Georgiana or accept the inevitable, for it looked as if she must make a permanent home for her in the West. Georgiana's health had already greatly improved, verifying the judgment of the home physician. In spite of her running wild out here, riding the horses, and upon several occasions dancing the whole night long, she had gained in flesh.

Georgiana was a flirt, roguish, sweet, playful, and apparently innocent of deliberation, but nevertheless a flirt. Her attractiveness and her newness made this propensity to flirt a vastly more serious matter than if she had not brought the Eastern immodesty of dress, freedom of speech, unrestraint of action, and the fatal fascination of a possible attainableness.

Miss Stockwell had come to realize that these clean, virile young men of the Tonto would not long abide Georgiana. If no one of them grew serious, then perhaps there might not be a catastrophe. But Miss Stockwell believed one of these young men had already prostrated himself at the altar of her charm—Cal Thurman, the finest of the lot. Cal had grown strangely older in these few weeks. What would that lead to if Georgiana persisted in flirting?

But Miss Stockwell was sure that Georgiana, wild and willful and brazen as she was, despite the impression of utter materialism that she gave, had never been really bad. She was very young. Time and change of environment would work wonders with her.

Miss Stockwell made a decision that day, for herself as well as Georgiana, and it was that the West should claim them both for good. Whereupon she wrote a long letter to her mother, telling much about Georgiana, though omitting the things that would worry and distress, and concluded with mention of the important decision and how it was best for all concerned, and that some day she and Georgiana would make a visit back home.

When this was done she sat looking out of her window, across the green pasture, across the orchard red with apples, across the yellowing corn and sorghum, to the rise of rugged hills that lifted fringed domes of rock and brush to the wild purple ranges beyond. This Tonto country had claimed her forever, whether or not her secret romance had a happy ending. The children of these mountain people needed education. She loved the work and if necessary she could devote her life to it. But she had vague hope of the fulfillment of her dream.

"Mary, air you aboot heah this mawnin'?" came in Georgiana's languid voice from the little room beyond. This room had been a sort of shed adjoining that end of the house. Georgiana had coaxed Cal to fix it up with Indian blankets on the walls and deerskins on the floor, and here in very cramped quarters, with the furniture necessary and her belongings, she was happy.

"Yes, I'm here, Georgie, I've been up

for hours and have written a long letter to Mother."

"For Heaven's sake bring me a drink of water," cried Georgiana. "Talk about a dark-brown taste! The stuff these Tonto jakes call white mule has some kick."

Mary poured out a glass of water from her pitcher, and carrying it in to Georgiana, sat down upon her little bed. The girl half sat up and propped herself on her pillows. She drank all of the water and then evidently was not satisfied.

"Georgie, did you really drink any of that liquor they call white mule?" queried Mary seriously.

"I'll say I did," replied Georgiana with a giggle.

"Where'd you get the drink?"

"Some of us went into that Ryson restaurant to eat a bite, about midnight. We had to stop dancing at twelve on Saturday night. Well, Bid Hatfield was with us at our table and he had a flask. He dared us girls to take a sip of his white mule. The girls took a sip, and then I swallowed a mouthful quick, just for a new experience. I got it. Holy Moses! I'll never touch that stuff again, believe me."

"Georgie, I don't care much for Bid Hatfield," said Mary thoughtfully. "I'm surprised he'd come up to you when you were with the Thurmans."

"Boyd didn't like it for a cent. I'll tell you, Mary, on the level I haven't any use for Bid Hatfield except to string him along. He's so darned stuck on himself."

"Was Cal there?"

"He rode in on horseback," replied Georgiana, with subtle change of tone. "He got there late. I was teaching some of the boys and girls how to toddle. Cal saw us—and he beat it pronto. What do you know about that?"

"I know a good deal, Georgie dear," replied Mary, earnestly. "Suppose we have a long talk, not about Cal particularly, but about everything."

"O Lord! Now you're going to hop me again," cried Georgiana. "Mary, I had enough of that back home!"

"No, dear, I'm not going to get after you again," said Mary kindly. "But as we are going to live together and I'm going to take care of you till you are well and strong—isn't it fair that we have talks—understand each other's point of view?"

"Sure it is. I'll try. But I'm only a kid, and—and I'm going to raise—to have a good time or die. I'll be young only once. Can you understand that?"

"I think so," replied Mary, weighing her words. "It's youth. I had a feeling something like it when I was seventeen, enough for me to realize what you mean. But your attitude toward life is an exaggeration of that feeling. But you're not a fool, Georgie."

"No, it's because I'm wise that the old bunk doesn't go with me," replied the girl.

"By bunk do you mean religion, education, refinement, love, and marriage, as they used to be?"

"No. I mean it always has been a man's world until *now*," declared Georgiana with spirit. "Why don't you get down to brass tacks? Your disapproval of me sifts down to just one thing—how I dress, talk, and act before men! That's all. There isn't any more. Well, we kids have got it figured. We're wise. We see how our sisters and mothers and grandmothers have been buncoed by the lords of creation. By men! And we're not going to stand for it, see? We're going to do as we damn please, and if they don't like us they can lump us. But good night—the proof

is they like us *better*, if they don't know it."

"Georgie, you were active in Sunday school when I left home," said Mary, taking another tack. "Have you kept it up?"

"Do you think I'm a dead one?" flashed Georgiana. "I quit church when I was fourteen, and that was a year longer than I wanted to go."

"Perhaps that accounts for a great deal," mused Mary. "Very well, let's get down to brass tacks, Georgie dear," she said brightly.

"Go to it," replied Georgie.

"Do you love me?"

"Why, Mary—what a question!" burst out Georgiana in surprise. "Of course I love you."

"Would you stay out West of your own free will?"

"You bet. At least a long, long time—and maybe always if I could cop some nice rich rancher like Enoch. But you've your eagle eye on him."

"Georgie!" protested Miss Stockwell, blushing furiously. "How dare you?"

"Oh, come off, sis. Didn't you say something about brass tacks? You've fallen for Enoch, and if you had any sense he'd be eating out of your hand—pronto. Mary, he's a backward, slow sort of chap. He's afraid of you—thinks you're way above him. But he loves you and if you want him there's nothing to it but wedding bells."

Mary strove for self-control. "You're a dreadful little girl," she cried.

"Cut out the little, unless you mean size, sister dear," went on Georgiana. "Take it from me. I've seen Enoch watching you when you didn't see him. Now go on."

"Where was I? Oh yes—you acknowledged you loved me and you said you would stay out West of your own

accord. Well, so far so good," resumed Mary, gradually recovering from the break in her thought. "Now, Georgie, do you realize you're a flirt?"

"That's getting too personal and I won't admit it!" replied the girl loftily.

"No matter, you are, whether you realize it or not—Coming back to your way of dressing, acting, talking—do you think it safe with a man like Bid Hatfield?"

"Safe! Good night, I should say it wasn't," retorted Georgiana with startling candor. "He's a cave man—but that's why I get such a kick out of it."

"Well, if you're so wise, as you call it, and see that Hatfield is really a dangerous young man for a girl to trifle with—and if you love your sister well enough to spare her shame and unhappiness, how do you propose to trifle and spare—at once?"

"Simple as ABC, sister darling," responded Georgiana with a dazzling smile. "I'm far too wise to be alone with Hatfield, away from company."

"Very well, now let's mention some of the young men who have not shady reputations. There's Arizona. He worships you, but in a sort of awestruck way. You're a wonderful creature to him. He's not really in love with you. Then there are Boyd Thurman and Wess and Serge and Lock, all running after you, crazy after you, but I don't think any of them want to *marry* you."

"Oh, you don't? How very flattering!" exclaimed Georgiana. The words had cut her.

"These boys do not *understand* you, Georgie dear. They're tremendously attracted. You're a new species. They're eager for your flirting. They can't see the line you draw between flirting—and worse. To speak bluntly—they believe

you are cheap, easy, open to any light advance."

"Boobs!" burst out Georgiana, with purple fire flashing from her eyes. "The long-legged backwoods louts!"

"Don't insult them. It is you who are wrong. I *know* what most of them believe, and I can see trouble ahead. It's going to come when one of these wild Tonto boys falls genuinely in love with you. That will come, if it hasn't already."

"It has come, sister," replied the girl sullenly. "Your favorite Cal Thurman has gone off his head. He begged me—only three days ago—to *marry* him."

"Oh, Georgie, that is terrible," returned Mary, greatly troubled. "It is what I feared."

"Bah! It will do him good," flashed Georgiana. "He needs to be taken down a peg. Cal was dandy at first. I liked him fine until he began to get serious, sort of bossy, and jealous. Then good night."

"Georgiana, there's one boy you can't make a fool of. When he asked you to marry him he proved how fine and earnest he is. I'm ashamed of you."

Georgiana was unable to meet her sister's scornful and indignant gaze.

"Mary, we clashed right off the bat," she admitted. "Honest to God I liked him best—I do yet, to be on the level—but he made me sick."

"How?" queried Mary, sharply.

"Why, about the other boys—and my clothes. He was going to honey around last night, only that toddle stunt of mine made him sore again. I'll give him about another day. Then he'll crawl."

"Georgiana, this boy is much too good for you. You can't see his bigness. You're too set in your attitude—your silly, sentimental, vain obsession to get the best of men."

"Well, I got the best of him, all right, and unless he changes his tune I'll keep on doing it."

"Georgie, think over what I have said," concluded Mary, rising. "I shall not nag you. I love you dearly and am thinking only of your happiness. You cannot go on with this—this provocativeness. Not out here in this wild Tonto. It will land you on the rocks. These boys are uncouth, primitive, fun-loving and fight-loving, and as such they seem immensely interesting to you. But they have a code of honor that no woman can risk breaking.



Sunday was company day for the Thurmans; they had all gone away to visit relatives, leaving the teacher and her sister to get their own dinner. On former occasions this duty had devolved solely upon Mary. Today, however, Georgiana answered to one of her caprices and insisted on getting the dinner herself. Forthwith she donned a dainty white apron, trimmed with lace, and sallied out to the kitchen.

"Georgie, you *might* make some man a good wife, after all," mused Mary.

"Sister, old dear, get this," retorted Georgiana. "I'll make a darn sight better wife than the crocheting, old-fashioned, two-faced, mealy-mouthed tabby-cat you'd have me."

"Oh, so you have really condescended to imagine you might marry some day," laughed Mary.

"I don't see how a girl can have a home and babies without a husband," complained Georgiana.

Just then a sharp clip-clop of trotting

hoofs sounded outside on the hard road.

"That's Cal," spoke up Georgiana quickly. "Wonder what brings him home so early."

"You, probably," replied Mary dryly.

"Me? Nix. We're on the outs. Gee! if he comes in here I'll have to invite him to eat. Sis, you ask him."

"Of course I will. But how do you know it's Cal?" queried Mary, going to the window.

"I know his horse's gait."

Miss Stockwell looked out along the front of the house and then down the road to the corral. She saw a horseman leaning over to open the corral gate. When he straightened up she recognized Cal. His face was bloody and there was yellow dirt on his blue jumper.

"Oh dear!" she cried, startled.

Georgiana jumped up, and running to the window peered out. "What's the matter?" she queried.

"Cal's face was all bloody," replied the teacher in dismay.

"Was *that* all?" returned Georgiana, apparently without any particular interest. And returning to the table she began to pick at things.

"Wonder if he'll come in," she mused presently.

"He certainly will not," declared Mary. "Don't you know the boy better than that?"

"Know Cal Thurman? I know him frontward and backward," answered Georgiana scornfully.

Miss Stockwell then began her own lunch without comment, yet she kept a covert eye upon her sister. Georgiana seemed to be silent so as to listen the better. What she expected, however, failed to materialize. Presently she rose to go to the back door, which was open, and she looked out.

"Cal," she called instantly. "Cal!—Oh, I see you. What's happened?"

"Aw, nothin' much," came the surly answer from the yard.

"You're all bloody," cried Georgiana.

"Nope. You can't see straight. This's only wet Tonto mud."

"Say, you can't kid me," called the girl derisively. "What's happened?"

"I just ran into somethin'."

"Tell me!" ordered Georgiana impatiently. Then, "Cal, please come here."

"What you want?" he growled.

"If you don't come here I'll come out there," she threatened.

Here Mary stepped to the doorway herself, and espied the young man now coming up to the porch. He held a blood-stained scarf to his cheek.

"You're a pretty-looking sight, I don't think," went on Georgiana as he mounted the steps. "Cal Thurman, you've been fighting again!"

"Is that all you wanted to say?"

"I'll say a mouthful presently," she replied as she reached up to pull his hand and scarf away from his cheek. The action disclosed a rather ugly cut from which blood was oozing. "Oh, that's dreadful, Cal. So close to your eye! Let me bathe and bandage it for you."

She flew into the house with more of excited concern than Mary had ever seen in her before.

"Cal, have you been fighting again?" queried Mary, gravely.

"You ought to see the other fellow," laughed Cal, grimly.

Before Mary could question Cal further, Georgiana returned with her hands full of things, most noticeably a basin of water and a towel. Carefully they then bathed Cal's wound, which turned out to be a painful but superficial one, and managed to dress it with

cotton and adhesive tape. Whereupon Georgiana drew back and surveyed him with proprietary interest.

"Cal, did you lick him?" she asked, very curiously.

"Reckon it was fifty-fifty this time," returned Cal.

"Who?"

"What's that to you, Georgiana?" asked Cal.

That reply rather took the pertness out of Georgiana. She seemed at a loss for words. Then suddenly she had one of her bewildering changes and this time she became appealing.

"Cal, come in and see the wonderful lunch I got—all by myself. There's plenty for you, too. Won't you—just to please me? See how I really *can* do some useful work!"

Presently she got him indoors and to the table, where Mary joined them. Georgiana did the serving, but she had grown quiet. Mary felt the need of easing this situation and she talked. Cal lost his sullenness and the air of grim satisfaction he had worn and slowly responded to Georgiana's charm. But he kept dignity enough to make Mary certain that he was not a fool, however great his subjugation.

Later Cal, manifestly having watched for an opportunity, approached the teacher when she was walking alone in the yard.

"Come out with me a little—away from everybody," he begged.

Mary felt the boy's agitation and kept silent and avoided looking at him. They walked up the dusty road to where it curved round a knoll and passed a wide, gravelly, shallow canyon that opened into the valley.

"Teacher, are you on my side?" asked Cal, at last.

"You mean in your—your trouble with Georgie?"

"Yes. I never spoke out to you before," he went on, breathing hard. "I wanted to wait. I thought I would get over it. But I grew worse. An' to-day I fought a fellow who—who said somethin' about Georgie."

"Cal, aren't you taking Georgie too seriously?"

"Reckon I am. But I can't help that. I don't know what's happened to me, but it has happened. Will you be on my side, teacher?"

"Indeed I will, Cal," she replied feelingly. "What do you want of me?"

"Lord! I don't know. Reckon just to feel you understand—so I can talk to you. I'm afraid to have you tell Georgie that—that the way she does—with the boys—is goin' to raise hell here in the Tonto. I'm afraid. She's so darn clever. She'll know I've been talkin' to you."

"Cal, I gave her that very talk today," returned Miss Stockwell earnestly. "And I told her straight out that she could not go on with her flirting."

"Flirting—An' what did she say?"

"She laughed in my face, made light of my accusation, and simply could not see anything dangerous in you Tonto boys."

"She calls us boobs," he rejoined.

"Oh! Cal, I'm just as helpless as you are," cried the teacher. "I'm worse off. I have to take care of her. I have to stand it. I have to go on praying and hoping. She's—she's a little devil. But she's my sister, and, Cal, I love her. You can turn your back on her any day. I'd not blame you if you did."

"Can I, though? I've done it, but no use. That's the wrong way. Tell me, teacher, tell me the *right* way with Georgie."

"Cal, have you made up your mind

that you *must* go on trying to make Georgie like you?"

"Teacher, she *does* like me," he replied quickly. "I know. That's the hell of it. I feel somethin' I can't explain."

"Well, must you go on trying to make her like you more?"

"Reckon that's just about where I am now."

"Well, then, you've made a decision," responded the teacher. "Live up to it. Do your best. I fear Georgie isn't worth it. I'm afraid you're in for bitter disappointment. But if you must go on, why, do it with all your heart. Faint heart never won fair lady."

He looked up, and the trouble left his dark eyes in a smile.

"My mind was workin' it out a little that way," he said. "Today I persuaded Father to let me homestead the Rock Spring Mesa."

"Cal—you don't mean it!"

"Reckon I do. An' tomorrow, maybe tonight—if these boobs give me a chance—I'll tell Georgiana. Wonder what she will say."

"She will laugh, of course, and make all kinds of fun of you. But I shouldn't let it bother me."

"Teacher, nothin' is goin' to bother me after this but the one thing I'm afraid of."

"And what's that?" demanded Miss Stockwell, suddenly tense.

"If Georgie keeps up her—her flirtin'—as you called it—there's goin' to be hell. We don't savvy that. There are girls here who make eyes an' hold hands an' kiss—that sort of fun, you know. It's natural, I reckon, an' it often leads to courtin'. But that's not what Georgie does. She called that 'kindergarten stuff'."

Miss Stockwell had no reply for this.

"Teacher," went on Cal, deadly earnest, "I know this sure—if she keeps it up there'll be blood spilled."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Perfect Day

CAL took the lecture from Tuck Merry with meekness. He realized he had been too ambitious and had relied too soon upon the dearly earned experience Tuck was daily giving him.

"Buddy, you'd have licked that guy all to pieces if you hadn't lost your temper and forgot," Merry said. "Soon as he poked you one on the beak and hurt you, why, you blew up. You forgot the hooks I've been trying to teach you. It doesn't make any difference how hard anyone hits you or where—you just take it and smile."

"Aw, Tuck, that's impossible," burst out Cal. "How can you smile when you're hurt awful?"

"Buddy, I don't care how it hurts—you've got to hide it," went on Tuck. "Whenever a guy sees or thinks he can't hurt you then he's licked. But you're doing fair and I'll back you presently against any of these boys. You've got some punch, believe me, and soon as you learn to place it where you want, and get your footwork better, you'll lick the stuffings out of Tim or Wess."

"Tuck, it'll only be fun to lick them," said Cal with a grim laugh. "But I'm layin' for Bid Hatfield."

"Buddy, I had you figured," returned Tuck seriously. "That guy has twenty pounds of weight on you, which is too much handicap when the other fellow

can scrap. Better let me spoil his handsome mug."

"Tuck, I'm goin' to try, just the moment you let me," returned Cal. "I never see him but he sneers or says somethin'. An' then if I can't do it, you'll have to."

They had been out at their secret coverts in the brush where they kept the boxing-gloves and sandbag and where they repaired every day or so for Cal's instructions.

They parted at the gate of the orchard, Tuck wending his way down the lane toward the sawmill, while Cal thoughtfully proceeded on to the pasture to get one of his horses. All the horses except his had been driven to the corrals, and it so happened that the first one he could catch was his pinto Blazes.

Of late he had taken more of a liking to this rather wild little bronco, for the reason, no doubt, that Georgiana May Stockwell had preferred Blazes to any other of the Thurman stock. Blazes was really too spirited and dangerous for any girl new to the ranges. This fact, however, had made Georgiana all the more determined to ride him. She had tried twice. The first time she had succeeded so well that she was elated, but the second time Blazes had bucked her off. Cal had vowed he would not let her try again, not so much because he feared she would be hurt, as because he got an amazing degree of satisfaction out of the fact that she had taken to coaxing him.

Upon approaching the high corral fence, he was amazed and somewhat disconcerted to spy Georgiana astride the top-most pole. She wore her riding-suit and an old sombrero and a red scarf around her neck. One glance at her made him aware that she was way-

laying him. For three days, ever since he had come home with the cut on his face and she had bathed it, she had been bewilderingly nice and friendly and sweet.

"Howdy, Cal," she drawled. "I reckon you shore read my mind this mawnin'."

"That so? Well, I did it without thinkin'," he replied, and he halted before her.

"Cal, you're a peach to fetch Blazes for me to ride," she said with a dazzling smile.

"But I haven't done anythin' of the kind," he rejoined bluntly.

"Aren't you going to Tonto Canyon?"

"Who told you?"

"Your dad. He told me he was sending you to see if there were any cattle ranging the ridges on this side. He knew I was crazy to see the Tonto and he said I could go."

"Oh, he did! Well, I reckon that doesn't make any difference to me," replied Cal, eyeing her coolly.

"Cal, please take me," she begged.

"No, I won't," he replied, turning away from those blue eyes. Whenever she pleaded so, he felt that he ought to do anything for her, but he had a bitter distrust of the soft blue warmth of her gaze.

"Oh, Cal, why not?"

"It's a long hard ride, an' not for a tenderfoot."

"But I'll *always* be a tenderfoot if you don't roughen me up," she protested.

"Georgiana, can't you be on the level?" he asked plaintively.

"Why, Cal, I am on the level."

"You only want to ride Blazes. If it weren't for that, you'd have some of the other boys take you to the Tonto—an' make a rider out of you."

"Cal, I'd rather ride with you or go anywhere if—if you'd only—"

"What?"

"Well, be on the level, as you asked—if you'd just be a good pal and cut the mush."

"You mean—stop makin' love to you?" he queried stiffly.

She nodded.

"I have stopped," he declared.

"Yes—you've stopped that and everything. You don't see I'm on earth. It's all or nothing with you, Cal Thurman."

"Aw! I guess you hit it then," sighed Cal.

"Cal, give me a chance to learn to *like* you, can't you?" she retorted, with swift change. "Why, I've never been rushed that way before! You're too deadly in earnest. I want to have some fun."

"If you don't like me now you never will," returned Cal, with resignation. "An' I guess you never will."

"I *do*. I just said 'like' because I didn't want to use the—the other word."

Cal realized he was lost, yet without another word or look he started again to lead Blazes into the corral.

When he got inside the corral gate there she was confronting him.

"Cal, you know Tim will be crazy to take me."

"Sure I know that."

"Well, I'll ask him unless you take me. And I've never deliberately asked anything of him or the boys—except you. I'd *rather* go with you."

"Georgie!" he exclaimed helplessly.

"If I could only believe you!"

"I'll prove it. Ride Blazes yourself, and give me the scraggiest cayuse in the outfit."

Cal could hold out no longer. That last speech, coupled with the fact that Tim was sauntering over, leading a saddled mustang, proved his undoing.

"You win, Georgie, an' I'll let you ride Blazes," he said, throwing the halter to her, and he made off toward the shed to fetch a saddle.

"Mawnin', Cal. Looks like you got first prize at a rodeo," drawled Tim.

"Howdy, Tim," was Cal's short reply. Then he heard Tim address the girl:

"Mawnin', Miss Georgie. Shore am tickled thet you're ridin' with me today."

"Guess again, Tim," was Georgiana's arch reply.

Cal picked out his lighter saddle and, carrying it back to Blazes, he swung it in place and tightened the cinches.

"Wal, I'm shore glad I'm ridin' down Tonto way this mawnin'," Tim was saying.

"You're ridin' Mescal Ridge," spoke up Cal. "That's where Father said you were to go. An' if you come bellyachin' along with me, I'll tell him."

Tim swung round sharply. "See heah, boy, do you want the other side of yore face mussed up? Thet there word you used is offensive to me."

Georgiana came laughingly between them. "You fellows make me tired. Someday I'll call your bluffs and make you fight."

"Wal, Miss Georgie, when you do there'll be only two blows struck—one when I slam Cal an' the other when he hits the ground." With that parting shot Tim turned away.

Cal had to go to the farther end of the pasture, and before he caught his other horse, Georgiana came loping down on Blazes and helped corner the bay. She was radiant with joy. The pinto appeared unusually amenable and pranced around with her. Georgiana looked well on a horse and she was learning to ride.

"Georgie, run the edge off him," said Cal. "Lope up to the end of the pasture, then cut loose an' make him run back."

As she wheeled with a little cry of excitement and delight to urge the willing pinto to a lope, Cal watched her critically. Indeed she was improving. She kept her seat in the saddle very well. Upon reaching the fence, she turned back and let Blazes go.

Blazes could run, and at this gait was easy to ride. Georgiana's golden curls shone bright in the wind. As she neared Cal he saw her face as never before, and something warm and splendid swept over him. He had found a way to make her happy. Blazes came tearing down on a dead-level run, and Cal saw it was the fence more than the girl that stopped him.

"You're learnin' to ride, Georgie," he said. "You've improved a lot since you rode with me last."

"Am I? Gee! I hope you mean it. I've tried hard enough, goodness knows. But none of the boys have horses like Blazes. I feel easier on him."

"Blazes sure has an easy gait," replied Cal. "It'll be a tough day on you, Georgie, an' you'll need to take some lunch."

"I put some up—myself—enough for both of us," she said.

"Ahuh! You did? Made sure you were goin'?" he queried.

"Of course I knew you'd take me. You've nnever refused me anything, even when I was meanest."

"Don't bank too much on that," he said soberly. "Well, you ride down to the lower pasture gate, an' I'll catch up with you. Give Blazes a drink—an' say, where'd you leave that lunch?"

"It's hanging on the corral gate," she replied. "Don't forget it."

Cal located the khaki bag containing

the lunch, and as he lifted it off the fence he smiled to feel its weight. Saddling up, he mounted and rode by Wess and Arizona with only a casual nod.

"Hey! Think you're some punkins, don't you?" called Arizona jealously.

"Cal, kiss her for me," added Wess.

It was such remarks as this last that Cal found hard to endure. It somehow cast a slur upon the girl—gave her a shallow and light character that hurt him. Cal bit his tongue to hold back a reply to Wess, and riding out of the corral into the pasture, he took to the trail along the fence and soon reached the lower gate where Georgiana was waiting for him.

"Let's go," she cried gayly.

The trail led down into the foothills, along the steep side of a gully that was brushy and rocky. Live-oak brush and manzanita lined the trail and in many places crowded over it. Swinging head and shoulders to avoid being threshed was second nature to Cal. It pleased him to observe that Georgiana was quick to imitate his movements.

Presently the gully opened wide and the trail led down the rocky bed of a brook. The horses drank and then splashed on, cracking slippery stones, and sliding on others. There were banks of sand and gravel, and dark green pools under shelving banks where trout floated motionless. The foothills grew in size until the one farthest in sight assumed the proportions of a mountain.

Around a turn of the gorge the riders came upon a sycamore grove, green and gold and white, and when they entered it the shade appeared like a thick transparent amber light. Frost had already touched this secluded grove, and the sand was strewn with golden leaves. Once Cal turned to Georgiana,

intending to ask her if she did not like the place. But the question would have been superfluous. To the girl's excitement had been added something of intense and dreamy appreciation. Cal did not break the spell until he espied a flock of wild turkeys crossing a ridge ahead.

"What! Wild turkeys? Why, they're tame," she cried.

"Sure they're tame, but they're wild, all right," he laughed.

"Cal, *when* do I go turkey-hunting with you?"

"After the fall roundup."

"You promise to take me?" she persisted.

"Yes—if you promise not to go huntin' with any of the other boys," he replied hesitatingly.

"Cal, I don't need to promise that."

He pondered over this reply. Georgiana had a trick of making him feel that he was the exceptional one. But others of the Tonto boys had remarked about this peculiar trait of Georgiana's in their own interest. Suddenly Cal turned to ask:

"Georgie, have you ever ridden off the road with any of the boys?"

"No. Mary laid down the law and said I could not go with any boy but you. Aren't you flattered?"

"Would you disobey her?" asked Cal bluntly.

"Not in that. I hate to be bossed, Cal, but I know where to draw the line."

Presently the trail took a sharp turn between two sycamores so close together that a rider had to be quick and skillful to save his knees. Georgiana slipped her left knee back out of danger, but she was not quick enough with her right and struck it hard. Cal heard the thump.

"Oh—damn!" cried Georgiana. "Oh-h!

I hit my knee!"

"Georgie, I told you to look out when you had to go between trees."

"You're laughing!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Cal Thurman, you're a brute sometimes. I tell you that hurt like—like—"

"You bet it hurt," interrupted Cal. "That's why I laughed. Besides, it sort of tickled me to find out you are human."

"It knocked the skin off, I'll bet," said Georgiana, ruefully rubbing her knee.

"Do you want to go back?" he asked banteringly.

"I'd go on if my knee was broken," she retorted. "But I'll say that if you were a good sport you'd've gotten me a pair of chaps to wear."

"Georgie, I thought of that very thing," he returned eagerly. "There's a pair at Ryson that'd fit you if you cut them off at the bottom. Would you wear chaps—if I gave them to you?"

"Would I? After that knock on the knee?—Lead me to them!"

"I'll phone down for them tonight."

Below the sycamore grove the trail split, the right branch continuing down the gully and the left sheering up into the brush-covered foothills above which towered the vast green cliff-dotted slope.

Cal led the way up the first low, sandy, brushy foothill, and wound down the other side between the walls of grasping live oak, and up a steeper slope to the next hill that was really a step up the mountain. From its summit the whole vast bulk beyond loomed prodigiously. High up, the red cliffs cropped out of the green brush.

"Good night! Do you expect me to climb that?" queried Georgiana, aghast.

"Sure. Why, this's nothin' much,

Georgie—compared to the Rim or Diamond Butte."

"If I make good here, will you take me to climb those places?" she asked, with eyes dark and flashing on his.

"Ahuh," replied Cal, and his short affirmative in no way attested to his thrills.

"I'll do it or die."

So Cal led on. From the Bench the trail slanted up into the brush and disappeared. Cal's horse crashed into the thick scrub oak and broke through, while Cal bent low over the saddle. Looking back, he could not see Georgiana, but he heard her horse. When he reached the turn where the trail took its first zigzag, he saw her emerge from the thicket, sombrero awry, her blouse covered with leaves and bits of brush, and her face rosily radiant.

He rode on then, and at every zigzag turn he halted his horse to let him catch his breath, and Georgiana would ride up the slant below him to do the same. She was out of breath, too. Her bosom heaved. And when she removed her sombrero he could see her hair damp on her brow.

Then Cal reached a steeper ascent where the trail led up over rough granite. Cal bade her dismount and walk here, as he did. But once beyond this place, he mounted again, intending to



ride the whole of the remaining ascent. There were places where he thrilled even in his fear for Georgiana, and dared not look back. He should not have let her ride up such treacherous steps and turns. But somehow he was stern and dogged about it. She never uttered a single cry, and Cal noticed that she had sense enough to let Blazes choose the way, and confined herself to holding on, a matter not at all easy for a tenderfoot.

Long as was that slope, it seemed only too short to Cal. The last ascent was a lengthy one, and Cal's horse surmounted it far in advance of Georgiana's. When he turned to look down from the top, she was just emerging from a wall of green to enter upon that last straight piece of trail. She waved her gauntleted hand to him, and her call pealed upward. He watched her closely while she climbed the remaining distance, conscious that something tremendous was being decided for him.

At last she reached his level.

"Somewhat frazzled—but still in the—ring!" she panted out joyously.

There were black brush marks on her face and a bloody scratch on her chin. She had jammed the sombrero on backward, and from under its rim straggled locks of tangled golden hair. The top button of her blouse had been torn off, exposing the brown and white of her neck. The sleeves likewise had suffered sundry tears. Altogether, she appeared a considerably disheveled young lady. Then Cal looked again into her face—looked keenly this time. He saw a light there—or was it in her eyes?—and quickly he averted his gaze.

"You—sure did—well," he said awkwardly, in the grip of his feeling. "I'll

tell you now—that's no trail for a tenderfoot girl."

"Then I've graduated?" she queried.

"Well, hardly that, but you've advanced a grade—Georgie, did you like that long hard ride?"

"Cal, you'll never believe me," she replied with impulsive earnestness, "but I'll say that's my idea of a great time."

Two hours of riding, much of it down rock-strewn trails, brought Cal and his riding comrade to the divide. Here began the long-sloping bare ridges and the shallow heads of canyons that, inclining endlessly down, grew more rugged and deeper and rockier, to break off suddenly into the black chasm of the Tonto.

"Oh, how barren and wild!" exclaimed Georgiana. "I expected it all green, because you said it was cattle country. There's no grass—nothing level—all seems so terribly rough. Surely we can't ride down there. Can we?"

"You bet we can. Yes, it's hard goin', but cattle live in those canyons an' there's where we chase them, rope them, brand them.

"Look. See that old white-faced bull standin' down there lookin' up at us—an' there's three steers lower down in the brush. Georgie, that's what I'm ridin' this ridge for—to get a line on where the cattle are. They're stragglin' all over an' it takes a lot of lookin' to locate them. An' when it comes to round-in' them up—well, it's what you call 'good night'!"

"What do you know about that!" she exclaimed. "A few white dots—faces of cattle—in all that awful up-and-down country."

The girl became thoughtful, and swept her gaze from the first shallow depths of the canyon, where the cattle

were grazing, to the far-distant, dark depths of the Tonto, and beyond to the great domed black mass of Diamond Butte, and to the wonderful lines of ridges sloping endlessly away from it down out of sight into the basin. This scene always held Cal for a moment, and he had gazed at it in all kinds of weather and at all hours of the day.

"Well, Georgiana, I have work to do," said Cal finally. "The three canyons to look over, an' that'll take ridin'. But when I leave the trail to ride off a little ways here an' there you can stop to rest."

"Say, Cal—don't forget that swell lunch I put up," she returned.

"Ahuh! I thought you'd remind me of that. But it's hours before we can eat."

"Hours? Look here, boy, I can't live on scenery."

"Georgie, the longer we save that lunch, the better we'll enjoy it."

"I suppose you think I can live on love," she pouted.

"No, Georgiana. I've had wild dreams about you, but never any as wild as that," he replied, with a steady look at her.

"Ahuh!" she retorted, imitating him again. "All the same, my wise friend, I *could* live on it if I *wanted* to."

Cal rode on, certain that the day would be lost, and perhaps something of its charm, if he continued to bandy words with Georgiana. So calling for her to follow, he trotted his horse down the trail. At a point below, where the depression of the ridge formed what riders called a saddle, he turned off to the left and surveyed the open, dusty patches of ground until he found a well-defined cattle trail leading down over the ridge into the next canyon.

He rode on then with eyes searching

the slopes for the white and red of the Thurman cattle. These were few and far between, and after a mile of riding he knew the scarcity of cattle sign meant that grass was scant this season on these mescal ridges. The blades of the soapweed had been nipped, and likewise the low scrubby oak brush.

Riding to and fro across this slowly descending league-long ridge, he used up all of the rest of the morning hours and some besides, and frequently he had to leave Georgiana alone for longer than he liked.

"Believe me, Cal, you're the first fellow who ever took me out and left me to entertain myself," complained the girl.

"Georgie, you came with me," he protested. "I've got to do my work."

"I was only kidding you," she continued, with a gay laugh. "Honest, Cal, I'm having a dandy time. I'm glad to be left alone a bit. It's new. Maybe I'll dig up a sensible thought. But I'm most starved."

"Just a little longer. We'll ride down to the jump-off."

He led on then down a steep slope littered with loose rocks where the horses found hard going, down through mescal and oak, and over patches of bleached grass, to the wall of the Tonto. The tremendous gorge yawned a thousand feet, its near slope a succession of benches of broken cliff and splintered crag with niches choked with cedar and piñon, and the opposite one a sheer red wall, like bronze, unscalable and beetling. Far below murmured Tonto Creek, a green-and-white stream of water, winding its way through iron confines.

"If I ever want to jump over the top into no man's land, lead me here!" ejaculated Georgiana.

Cal's observant eye noted that she did not dismount without a little sign of lameness. He tied the horses and then, possessing himself of the lunch bag, he led Georgiana to a flat rock where a low piñon made shade, and the drop was sheer.

That half hour, during which they dispatched the lunch to the last morsel, was the pleasantest and happiest he had ever spent with Georgiana. She was just a hungry, wholesome girl, unconsciously glad to be alive, to be there in this wonderful place. He hated by word or action to dispell the charm.

"Cal, you're growing thoughtful," observed Georgiana.

"Ahuh! Would you like to know my thoughts?"

She gave him a little glance. "I reckon not—if they are the same as your looks."

"Georgie, I'm goin' to homestead the Rock Spring Mesa," he declared bluntly, without regard for her wishes.

"You'll be a regular pioneer," replied Georgiana dreamily. "I read something once—some book about a pioneer girl. Believe me, she sure had it coming to her."

"What? Work, loneliness, struggle?"

"I'll say so! Cal, when you stay on your 'homestead' will you be by yourself?"

"I should smile. I'll have to cook my own meals, do the washin', chop wood, milk the cow, plow an' sow an' cut an' haul."

"Good night!" She regarded him with a new curious thoughtfulness. "Cal, you're a smart fellow and you could do well in the city. Why don't you do that?"

"I love the open country—the lonely places. My people were all pioneers. It's in me. An' let me tell you, Georgie,

the pioneer, the rancher, the farmer are in my eyes the real Americans. There would never have been any cities, or any business men, if the pioneers had not blazed the trails an' opened up the wild country."

"Cal, that's big, serious talk—and somehow it makes me feel little and thoughtless, self-centered. Oh, I'm no good."

"Aw, Georgie, don't talk silly," he remonstrated.

"Cal, I'm what they call the twentieth-century girl," responded Georgiana. "We won't be bossed. We're bound to have our own way. We defy all conventions. We're going to do as men have always done. We're going to be free."

Pondering that for a long moment, Cal finally replied, "Georgie, if the girls of your kind are all thinkin' that way, it'll be bad for the future. Women are to make homes."

"Listen to him!" exclaimed Georgiana. "Make homes? Yes—for the lords of creation—for men. Cal, that's the same old talk, the same old bunk."

"Bunk?" echoed Cal, suddenly stirred. "It's nothin' of the kind. If you women—you *new* women—don't intend to make homes for men, what's to become of us?"

"You can search me, Cal," she replied with a gay laugh. "They'll all have to 'homestead', like you're going to."

Cal gazed silently down into the depths of the canyon. Her words jarred on him. They seemed flippant. They were somehow false. She did not know what she was talking about. He could not reason out the explanation for his convictions, but he felt their truth.

"I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings," resumed Georgiana, presently. "Cal, maybe I'm not so rotten as I seem."

"I think you're all right," replied Cal, soberly. "Well, if we want to get back to the ranch by sundown, we'd better be rustlin'."

"Oh, it's so nice here. Will you fetch me again?"

"Sure. Next week we round up the cattle here an' drive them to the big pasture. That'll be worth seein'. But you've got to be sensible an' careful now, an' do as you're told. Some of these wild cattle are bad."

"I promise. And will you let me ride Blazes again?"

"Well—after today, I reckon you'll not have to ask me that," he said with an air of mystery.

"Cal! Do you mean I'm no longer a tenderfoot?" she flashed eagerly.

"No, I wasn't thinkin' of that."

"What then? You're so—so queer."

"Reckon Blazes won't be mine after today."

"Oh, Cal—you wouldn't sell Blazes or trade him to *anybody*! When I love him so!"

"I sure wouldn't."

"Say, boy, you're talking riddles," she protested, and she sat up, and got to her knees, and confronted him with earnest, shining doubtful eyes.

"Georgie, after today Blazes will not belong to me," he said, with eyes steady on hers.

"Why?" she queried, quick as a flash.

"Because—this mornin' I gave him to you."

"Gave—him—to—me?" she echoed breathlessly.

"I sure did. Blazes—with saddle, blanket, bridle—is yours."

"Oh, Cal!—*Mine*?" she cried rapturously.

"Sure is," replied Cal.

"You darling!" she cried, and she bent swiftly to kiss him full on the lips.

For an instant all around him seemed to reel and his heart labored high in his breast. Presently the green canopy of the friendly piñon became as formerly, and the Tonto yawned beneath him, deep, lonely, wild, with its murmuring waters. Georgiana had flown to where the horses were tied, and Cal could now hear her laughing and crying out her joy of her precious possession. Then he heard her quick light footsteps returning. He got up and turned to face her.

"Cal, I'll say you're a regular fellow," she said, with hand outstretched, and she came right up to him where he now leaned against the big branch of the piñon.

Cal took her in his arms. She did not draw back, rather leaned to him, with glad face uplifted and the little gloved hand going to his shoulder.

"Georgie—you shouldn't—have kissed me," he said huskily.

"Why not? You sure deserved it. And I *wanted* to. I'll do it again if you think it wasn't enough."

"I didn't want thanks," he replied unsteadily. "I just wanted to make you happy."

"You succeeded, boy, and I'll never forget this day."

"But, Georgie—I—I love you," he burst out.

"Well—all the more reason I should kiss you."

"No. No—unless you love me."

"Of course I love you, Cal—that is—I think—"

Cal clasped her tight, lifting her slender form, and bent to her upturned, glowing face. He kissed her hair, her cheeks, and then her mouth, until she cried out in laughing protest and forcibly drew back from him. Still, she did not wholly slip out of his arms.

"Cal!—You don't want a homestead. You want a cave!"

"Georgie—forgive me—if I was—"

"Cal, where did you ever learn to kiss like that?" she interrupted, with mock jealousy.

"Why, Georgie—I didn't learn—it's only because I love you," he protested.

"Now don't you try to kid me, Cal Thurman," she replied, shaking a finger in his face. "I've half a mind to think you a regular lady-killer of the Tonto. No fellow could come across with kisses like yours unless—"

"Georgie, I swear to heaven I never kissed but two girls—an' that was long ago—when I was a mere boy."

"I'm the only girl you ever loved?"

"Why, of course," he said simply.

"All right, I believe you," she rejoined, after a long look into his eyes. "Now I think we had better start home before you get gay again."

"Wait, Georgie," he returned, detaining her, "I—I haven't said all—what I must ask—Georgie, will you marry me?"

"Now you're going to spoil it," protested Georgiana plaintively. "Couldn't you be satisfied with all I've said and done?"

"Georgie, I'm crazy about you an' dead in earnest. Won't you be engaged to me?"

"No, I won't," she replied frankly. "Not now; maybe sometime. Cal, I'm not sure of myself. Today I love you a little—and I did want to kiss you—I *did* like your kisses; but tomorrow I might feel differently."

"You'll break my heart," he said desperately.

"Cal, why won't you cut the marriage stuff and just be my good pal? I do like you best."

"Georgie, you want to hang on to me,

an' still have good times with the other boys, don't you?"

Again her gay frank laughter thrilled out. "Caught with the goods! Cal, you're a wiz—that's just what I want."

"Georgie, you'll not have any trouble hangin' on to me," he said bluntly. "But you'll have a hell of a lot of trouble if your good times with the other boys get as—as far—as what you did to me."

"Oh, is that so?" she replied haughtily. "If that isn't just like a man! Cal, when anyone tries to boss me I always do the thing I'm forbidden."

"Georgie, let's not say any more," he said resignedly. "I didn't mean I would give you trouble. You don't savvy these Tonto fellows. Let's be rustlin' back home. It's nine miles, an' uphill most of the way."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Sweet Revenge

ALL the uplands of the Tonto had augmented their autumn colors. Down in the foothills the bright golds and reds were limited to isolated bits set like gems in the dark green of the brushland. Here and there a grove of walnut trees still held enough leaves to make a contrast; and down in the winding ravines, between the foothills where water ran, there were clumps of sycamores still holding their foliage, growing more colorful and beautiful as the October frosts advanced. On sunny southern slopes there were little patches of sumac, growing red, and some of the ledges of rock showed crimson and bronze vines. But in the low hills the prevailing

hue of the season was the dark gray-green of mingled oak, juniper, cedar, and manzanita.

One evening at Green Valley when the cattle count was over, and the roundup not far off, Henry Thurman called his riders together.

"Boys, thet 'air sorghum share ought to be cut," he said. "It'll only take a few days, Gard is sendin' his boys down tomorrow. So you pack an outfit up to Boyd's homestead an' rustle thet job."

"Suits us," replied Wess. "Reckon it'll take all of three days. Uncle Henry, after the roundup who's drivin' the cattle to Winslow?"

"Wal, reckon you'd better see Enoch aboot thet. You can't nary all go. Cal's daid set on homesteadin' Rock Spring, an' some of us will hev to cut an' haul logs."

"Say, boy, what you-all rarin' aboot?" drawled Wess, turning to Cal.

"I wasn't in a hurry until I got a hunch Hatfield has an eye on Rock Spring Mesa."

"Oho! He has. Who told you?"

"Father got it straight from Uncle Gard."

The old pioneer nodded confirmation of this and told the boys that it would never do to let the Bar XX outfit get a wedge into their upland cattle range. Then in the serious discussion which followed, the fact came to light that there was evidence of the Thurmans losing cattle. Rustling on a large scale was a thing of the past, but the loss of unbranded calves had grown to be more than the mere mistakes natural to cattlemen of a wild range. Someone was deliberately driving Thurman calves from the cows, before they should have been separated, and was branding them.

"All I can say, boys," the rancher

concluded, "is fer you to keep your mouths shut an' yore eyes open. I'll lay off at the mill an' fetch Tuck Merry up to Boyd's to help you fellers cut the sorghum. An' I'm willin' to bet you-all thet he'll cut more an' carry more than any of you.

"Thet limber-legged galoot beat me at rustlin' sorghum!" ejaculated Wess, in high dudgeon at the suggestion.

"Wess, nary you or any of the boys figger my sawmill hand correct," drawled Henry, with his dry chuckle. "Shore I've told you how he beat you-all holler in the sawmill. Best hand I ever hed."

Wess was disgruntled. His supremacy had been questioned, and that by a tenderfoot from outside. Naturally, the other boys made it worse, by backing up Henry and offering to make bets on their own opinions. Cal capped the climax by offering to wager a horse against one of Wess's that Tuck Merry could beat him.

"Aw, ain't you gamblin' a little free with yore hosses?" queried Wess sarcastically. "You bet yore best hoss you'd lick Tim inside of a year. An', Cal, time's a-flyin'. Then you give Miss Georgie yore pinto—which it ain't hard to kalkilate how you was gamblin' there an' how you'll lose. Now you've gall enough to bet me yore last good hoss. I hate to take advantage, Cal, considerin' yore failin' intelleck, but yo're on."

Next morning, when the first gray light in the east heralded the coming of the dawn, Enoch Thurman stalked out of the house and yelled in stentorian voice that penetrated to the very sleepest brain there:

"*The day's busted!*"

Enoch was the chief of the Thurman

clan, and his call was a signal for all to rouse. By daylight breakfast was steaming on the long kitchen table, and by sunrise saddles and packs were being strapped, and soon after the riders were on their way to the sorghum ranch.

It was a flat piece of land about three miles from Green Valley, toward the Rim, and suffered greatly by contrast with the lower fertile ranch. Boyd Thurman had founded his homestead here, and eighty of the one hundred and sixty acres were under cultivation. These eighty acres comprised one great level field of sorghum, a yellowing plant somewhat resembling corn or cane, though not so high. Weeds and wild flowers grew quite as thickly as the stalks. Little cultivation had been given this field since the planting of the sorghum. A rude fence of poles and rails, and in some places wire, surrounded the inclosure to keep out cattle and horses and deer.

At the lower end of the clearing stood a couple of cabins and a barn, all weathered and in bad state of repair. Since proving up on his homestead, Boyd Thurman had lived mostly at his father's. And this immense field of sorghum was the property of all the Thurmans. Jointly they had planted it, and jointly they would harvest and divide it.

While the boys from Green Valley were unsaddling and unpacking their outfit, and pitching camp under the trees near the cabins, the other contingent of Thurmans hove in sight, nine riders strong, with more than that number of pack horses.

At nine o'clock they were sitting or standing round the pine tree which marked Enoch's camp, and all were sharpening their knives on the little

whetstones each carried with him. In all they numbered seventeen workers, not including Henry Thurman. Despite his years, he could work along with most of the boys, when it pleased him to do so.

"Wal, fellers," spoke up Enoch, as he tested his knife blade with a broad thumb, "one man to a row an' pack all he can."

"Enoch, I got a bet on heah an' I'm rarin'," growled Wess.

"Ahuh! An' what're you bettin', an' who?" replied Enoch with great interest.

Wess told his version of the matter forced upon him, and his tone was at once grieved and flamboyant; and then Cal poured oil upon the fire by his boastful confidence in Tuck Merry; and Cal's father added the last straw to Wess's burden.

"Wal, is airy one of you fellers achin' to bet me? I'm shore a-backin' my saw-mill hand."

Whereupon various and incredible bets were placed. Finally the gamblers had apparently exhausted resources, and the conditions were put up to Enoch.

"Wal, doggone me!" he ejaculated. "Shore it ain't a square deal. Wess was cuttin' sorghum when he was knee-high to a grasshopper, an' I reckon our long-legged pard Merry never seen a sorghum field till he hit the Tonto."

"Right-o," declared Tuck. "I'll do my darnedest to win for you who're backing me, but don't fail to notice I'm not betting any myself."

"Be a sport, Tuck," spoke up Cal, and he winked at his friend. "I'm goin' to win another bet today beside this one on you. So let's plunge."

"Oh, if that's the dope, I'll kick in," responded Tuck. "Wess, I'll lay you

ten I'll beat you cuttin' this junk and another ten that I can carry more of it."

"Aw, I'll take double that," responded Wess grandly.

"That's my limit, Wess, and I'm making you a present of it," said Tuck.

"Shore he is," interposed Enoch. "Wal, now listen, all you buckaroos. I'll work along with Tuck this mawnin'. It's only fair to break him in. Then after the noon-hour rest we'll have the race. Cuttin' up the field once, one row, an' back heah again one row. An' I'll be judge. Is that satisfactory, Wess?"

"Reckon it's fair," replied Wess.

"Wal, then, let's go to work," said Enoch, getting up.

Thereupon they advanced to the western side of the field, and each taking a row of sorghum to himself, they bent their long bodies to the labors of harvesting.

The method of procedure was simple. The sorghum stalks grew about a foot apart. They were slender but tough. A knife had to be sharp and the hand strong. When the stalk was cut it was shifted into the hollow of the left arm, or laid on the ground, according to the cutter's particular way of working. The field was nearly a mile long and the rows of sorghum ran the whole length.

At once the line of advance grew irregular. Wess took the lead, without any apparent effort, and he just stalked and stooped along as if he were picking up apples. He forged ahead, and the other boys advanced according to their capacity and inclination.

Thus this group of harvesters cut down the field. Notwithstanding the fun and play they made of it, it was a man's game. Wess reached the starting-point ahead of all his followers, and the time was one hour and a quarter for the round trip. His blue shirt was



as wet with sweat as if it had been soaked in water. His hands were grimy.

Toward noon the sun shone down hot. A breeze blew the clouds of dust from the dry field. The harvesters grew weary with their exertions and ceased to sing and banter, and slowed up on their return.

Serge Thurman had left off after the first trip, and by the time the others straggled back he had a noonday meal almost ready. One by one they trooped in after Wess, to drink copiously and wash their dirty faces, and then fall down gratefully in the shade.

Cal beat Tim in by a dozen rods or more, and he made way for his covert design by casting reflections upon Tim's lax ambitions as a harvester.

"Say, I'm a cowman," retorted Tim testily. "I'm used to ridin' where there wasn't any fence, let alone cornfields. I ain't no farmhand."

"Huh! I don't see any medals on you as a cowman," retorted Cal in return.

"You don't, hey?" queried Tim, with a frown. "Strikes me yore gettin' orful fresh lately."

"An' come to think of it, I can't see any medals on you for ridin' or ropin'—or makin' up to the ladies—or even fightin'," returned Cal cheerfully.

Everybody except Tim roared with laughter.

"Cal, if you hed any sense, you'd be a good jedge of that last," he said, with dark meaning.

"Tim, I was never even impressed with your way of fightin'," continued Cal. "You don't hit hard. Your footwork is rotten. You can't stand punishment."

"But I licked you four times—four times, my ridin' Romeo—an' done it without half tryin'," shouted Tim.

"Tim, you only think you licked me," observed Cal. "Wait till after grub time."

"Wal," drawled Enoch, when he had eaten the last morsel on his tin plate, "which one of these heah two entertainin' stunts are we goin' to see first?"

"Two?" asked his father. "What besides the cuttin' race between Wess an' my man?"

"Wal, Cal's got to lick Tim sometime this year or lose his best hoss," observed Enoch.

"Boys, you cain't spend all day like a lot of bettin' Indians," put in Henry. "Reckon I don't mind if you do the work."

"We won't lose any time on Wess an' Merry," said Enoch. "We'll march right along with them, an' after we're through Tim an' Cal can beat each other up."

Whereupon they returned to the harvest-work as before, only Enoch started Wess and Merry ahead of them. And it was noticeable that every time a harvester would straighten up he would take a moment of keen interest in the rivals, working so furiously ahead. Wess forged to the front and gradually drew away from Merry. The lusty calls of the workers in the rear pealed out in the hot still air. Almost all of the cheers were for the benefit of Merry.

"Stay with him, boy," called one.

"He's a-rarin', Tuck, but he won't last," yelled another.

Indeed, this appeared to be true. The lengthy tenderfoot had begun to close the gap between him and the seasoned harvester. Wess had been pushing himself too hard or was slowing up to gain breath for the finish. But he made the

end of the field in record time, and was several rods on the return trip when Merry reached the turn. Wess kept his lead, and finished far enough ahead of Merry to prove his very considerable superiority. The others trooped back.

"Reckon it ain't decided yet," declared Enoch. "Wess wins the cuttin'. Now let's see who can pack the most sorghum."

Thereupon Wess began to walk along a row of cut sorghum, raking portions of it into a pile. When he had arranged a number to his liking, he took a bundle of stalks in his arms and then went on to the next, until he had collected an enormous quantity. He was completely hidden under a huge shock of sorghum. While he held it Enoch measured its girth with a string. Then Wess set the immense bundle on the ground.

"Wal, Tuck, it's your turn," said Enoch. "An' between you an' me, I think you can beat him."

Thus encouraged, Tuck Merry began to rake the cut sorghum into piles, somewhat after the manner of Wess though not so neatly.

Cal went along with Tuck and encouraged him. The lanky tenderfoot began to pick up the piles he had collected until he grew to be a walking stack of sorghum, a most interesting and amusing sight to the watchers. Wess's dirty face began to express his astonishment.

"Son-of-a-gun has me licked now!"

"Wal, let's see," said Enoch as he threw his cord over the great bundle, and then sprawled on the ground to find the end. Rising then, he circled the pack and got the measurement.

"I'm a son-of-a-gun," he exclaimed with a grin. "He's beat Wess by a whole foot."

Tuck dropped the rustling shock of

sorghum, or rather emerged from under it, a dust-encumbered and ludicrous figure. Wess met his outstretched hand and shook it as a man who had respect for his better.

"You win thet heat," he said. "Now let's measure arms. I'm sorta curious how you done what nobody else ever done."

The two tall harvesters stood facing each other with right arms extended, and the remarkable fact became plain to all that Merry's arm was six inches longer than Wess's.

"Wal, thet tells the story," concluded Enoch. "All bets off, boys. It shore was a draw. An' now let's go back to work."

When the harvest was over for that day, one-third of the great sorghum field had been cut—a showing which Henry Thurman viewed with simple delight.

"By golly! Thet 'air's really a fine day's work," he exclaimed. "You all done well, 'cept Tim, who hates work, an' Cal, who'll just never be no sorghum rastler."

"Wal, I reckon them two was savin' up," drawled Enoch. "They shore was slow."

"Now I forgot all aboot thet," returned Henry. "I'll shore enjoy seein' Tim lick Cal again. Say, Tim, air you a-goin' to do it before supper or after?"

"Seein' you tax me, I'll say I'd like what little exercise it'd take before I clean up fer supper," retorted Tim.

Cal was more than ready. His keen eye had caught sight of Georgiana and her sister Mary out on the road. They were returning from school, where Georgiana had spent the day, and on the moment were approaching the gate under the walnut trees a little distance from the camp. No one, save Cal, apparently

had observed them. He leaped to his feet.

"Come on, Tim—you bowlegged little hop-a-long bronco buster. I'm hungry an' I want to get this over before supper."

The crowd greeted Cal's speech with delight. Tim slowly got to his feet, his red face showing a dubious contempt.

"Come an' take it," cried Cal banteringly. "Come out here. Tim, you've had the fun of lickin' me four times, an' you ought to be sport enough to take your medicine like I took mine."

"You make me mad, Cal Thurman," growled Tim. "You're too fresh. An' I'm gonna lick you fer the fifth time—which'll be all you'll ever want."

He slouched out onto the grassy plot away from the group under the tree, and certainly in plain sight from the road. This was what Cal wanted.

Suddenly Cal extended his hands, still wearing his old gloves, and he began to dance around Tim with the quickness of footwork that had been a part of the painful education imparted by Tuck Merry. Tim crouched close in on Cal, but could not find an opening. Cal increased his dancing steps, and began to feint with his fists, and saw instantly how Tim was bewildered by such tactics.

"Boys, don't miss this," called Cal piercingly. "You all know how Tim hates to have any one hit his big ugly nose. Now watch."

Manifestly the watchers were intensely absorbed and thrillingly expectant. Dancing round, Cal kept shooting out his left at Tim, just to bewilder him. Then with his right Cal flashed a hard cutting blow to Tim's nose.

He avoided Tim's heavy rush, and danced round; and then quicker than

before, he shot his left to the same sensitive spot. This time the blood started.

"I'll nose-jab you!" shouted Tim, hoarse with pain, as wildly he swung. But it was only to encounter a still stiffer blow.

"Aw!" bawled Tim.

"Holler, you boob!" returned Cal. Tim had hurt him many a time and had crowed over it. This was retribution and there was Georgiana Stockwell sitting on top of the high gate.

Then, just as suddenly, Cal changed his footwork so that instead of dancing around Tim he jumped toward him and then away. Tim did not do any backing. He followed, and always appeared at a disadvantage, too slow to reach Cal. All at once, Cal beat down Tim's waving fists, and pushed his left into Tim's face, not hard, but once, twice, three times; and then as Tim lost something of his poise, Cal swung a right powerfully into the pit of Tim's stomach. Tim gasped.

"That's the belly-wham!" called Cal. "Look out now—here comes the tooth-rattler!"

Tim, with terribly distorted face, eyes starting, mouth agape, jaw falling, seemed to be standing motionless. Then Cal ended the matter with a hard swing to the jaw. Tim went down in a heap and stayed down.

In the silence of astonishment that ensued, Cal stood over Tim, scarcely panting from his exertions, and looked down at his fallen adversary.

"Get up, Tim—before I cool off," he called.

But poor Tim could not get up. He could not lift his dizzy head. Whereupon the other boys suddenly recovered from their astonishment and began to give vent to wild and whirling mirth.

Most feeling of all, however, was

Tim Matthews, when he recovered enough to be able to talk.

"Wor'd—he hev—in them gloves?" he huskily demanded as Enoch helped him sit up.

"Just my fists," replied Cal, taking off the gloves and throwing them at Tim.

The vanquished rider pathetically pawed over the gloves.

"Aw—he had—rocks in them," wailed Tim.

"No, Tim, he hadn't nothin'," said Enoch, as with his scarf he began to wipe the blood from Tim's face. "He just licked you damn quick an' good."

Cal dropped to one knee beside Tim and held out his hand. "Do you want to shake on it?" he asked.

Tim slowly held out a shaking hand.

"Cal, I got what was comin' to me. But how'd you do it? A hoss kick is bad enough, but aw!—when you hit me, it was orful."

CHAPTER NINE

Surprise Announcement

SATURDAY, the last day of the October round-up, was the date of the principal dance of the season. Whereupon Mary Stockwell observed that late in the afternoon two processions were noticeable—one of the riders trooping wearily back to the ranch, and the other of a stream of vehicles on the road toward the schoolhouse, where the big dance was to be held.

When Mary went out to watch the October sunset, she saw Panhandle Ames and Arizona, with clean-shaven shiny faces, and dressed in their best, sitting on the porch. They appeared to be overcome by mirth.

"What's so funny, boys?" asked Mary.

"Aw—we just seen Lock Thurman comin' back leadin' the hoss he thought his gurl was goin' to ride," replied Panhandle.

"She's gone to the dance with another feller," added Arizona, in positive joy.

"An' Lock's face was as long as a mescal pole," continued Panhandle. "Lock's orful sweet on Milly. An' she'd promised to go to this dance with him."

"Why then did she not?" inquired the teacher curiously.

"Wal, all Lock knowed was that he was too slow gettin' there, an' she went with Bid Hatfield."

"No!"

"She shore did, an' if that doesn't cause a real fight, I'll swallow my spurs," replied Arizona.

"I ain't got no gurl to take, but I wouldn't miss this heah dance fer a million dollars," observed Arizona.

"You're mischievous boys," said Mary Stockwell.

"Wal, teacher," drawled Arizona, with a mysterious gleam of fun in his eyes, "there's some round heah who's sweet on you."

"Oh—indeed!" replied Mary, surprised into confusion. She turned away rather quickly, to walk out into the yard. When she got out to the fence, she was quite conscious of a heightened pulse.

That night, Georgiana was in one of her dangerous moods. Judging from the expression of Cal's face at the supper table, he and Georgiana had quarreled about something. As a result, Georgiana was aggravatingly slow in dressing for the dance, and held up

the party that was going in Enoch's car.

Presently, Georgiana emerged from her little room, gorgeously and scantily arrayed, with more powder and paint on her face than Mary had ever seen yet.

"Well, dear, if you want to create a sensation at this dance, you'll have your wish," said Mary soberly. "But I'm afraid it'll not be the kind of sensation you like."

"Bunk!" exclaimed Georgiana. "Men are all alike—at home in New York, or in darkest Africa—or the Tonto Basin. Believe me—"

She was interrupted by a knock on the door. Mary opened it to disclose Cal standing there.

"Hello, Cal! Come in," she said.

"No, thanks," he replied as he stood on the threshold. His keen gaze swept over Georgiana from head to foot.

"Then—I'm not goin' to take—you?" he demanded bluntly.

"Not to this dance, or any dance, or any place," she replied cuttingly.

"Who's goin' to take you tonight?"

"That's none of your business, but if you're aching to know—I'm going with Tim," she replied.

"Tim!" ejaculated Cal.

"Yes—Tim!" she retorted.

"You sure are hard up," rejoined Cal with sarcasm. "But I'm sayin'—if Tim kicks on that dress—you might get Bid Hatfield to take you."

"Tim is a gentleman," retorted Georgiana. "And Bid Hatfield knows how to act like one, which is more than I can say for some people."

"Reckon—you'll dance with Hatfield?" queried Cal, as if compelled to voice a question he hated.

"Will I?"

"Georgie," he began, "I know you

despise me an' you have no use for any of us Thurmans, but you love your sister—an' for her sake don't dance with Hatfield—an' don't try those new dances you've been teachin' some of the boys an' girls."

"Come and watch me," said Georgiana deliberately.

"I'll not be there," returned Cal, and turning on his heel he strode off the porch into the darkness.

Mary closed the door. "Georgie, what has he done now?"

"Done? He jumped me today because I was teaching some new dance steps. And just after dinner he told me if I wore this dress he wouldn't take me to the dance. Of all the nerve! Why, the fool is getting bossy! So I asked Tim."

"Well, Cal is young and hot-tempered and jealous, I know. But, Georgie, he certainly has been thoughtful of our interests. We're strangers to this country. You've done some silly things. Perhaps Cal has kept you from some real break."

"Oh, Mary, to give the devil his due—Cal has been nice. I *did* like him. But I can't stand this ownership stuff, and believe me I'll show him tonight."

"He'll not be there," replied Mary.

"You know a lot about men, sis, I don't think. Cal couldn't be kept away from this dance."

"There! Enoch is honking his horn again. Let us hurry!"

Outside the yard in the road, the big car was full of merry Thurmans, all of whom, except Enoch, were crowded into the back seats.

"Georgie, you pile in back with that outfit," directed Enoch, "an', Mary, you come in front with me."

Georgiana peered into the dark mass that filled the back of the car and plainly did not like the idea.

"Let me ride in front, too," she said.

"Not room," replied Enoch. "See that pile of cakes an' pies on the seat? Mary will shore have all she can do to keep them from joltin' off. We're late, an' I'm a-going' to smoke up this old wagon."

Mary found she had just room to squeeze in between Enoch and the enormous and overloaded basket of pies and cakes.

"Everybody heah?" asked Enoch.

"Reckon all but Cal," replied his father. "He ain't goin'."

"Shore Cal will be there," said Enoch with a chuckle. "Wal, let's leave some dust behind."

Enoch manifestly meant to make up for lost time. Along the level bottom land of the valley he drove so fast that Mary was thrilled and frightened at once. But the time came when Enoch had to drive slowly and carefully over rocky washes and round steep bends.

"Mary, tell me what ailed Cal," asked Enoch in a low voice. "I never saw him like he was tonight."

She told him briefly, and did not spare Georgiana.

"I'm worried aboot him," went on Enoch. "Shore this will never do. You understand, don't you, Mary?"

"I think so," replied Mary.

"Wal, I always felt you understood us. An' you've been a world of good. Father an' Mother feel as I do — we owe you a lot, Mary."

"Oh no! You owe me nothing," murmured Mary.

"Wal, we won't argue. But we ain't blind to your influence on your school. We never had anyone like you. Our kids like you an' they learn fast. It's a good work you're doin', Mary Stockwell."

"Thank you, Enoch. I—I can only say

I'm glad you think so—and that it's a work I love."

"Wal, do you intend goin' on teachin' our kids?"

"Surely. Just as long as you will have me."

"You reckon you want to stay on in Arizona?"

"Yes. I love it."

"Wal, that's fine," he went on. "If you feel that way, Mary, an' want to go on teachin' our children, you must like us Tonto folks."

"Indeed—I do," returned Mary.

"Mary," he began, after a long silence. "I reckon I've been in love with you since you first came heah. But I never had no hope till lately. An' now I'm bold enough to ask if you'll marry me."

"Yes, Enoch, I—I will marry you," she said softly.

His right hand dropped off the wheel and groped for hers. Mary met it halfway. Through her glove she felt the ruggedness and strength and hardness of it as he clasped hers close.

"Wal, shore I reckoned this heah dance was goin' to be a happy one for me," he said.

The merry young people hustled Henry Thurman into the schoolhouse. Mary found she was being led by Enoch, who at the same time was trying to protect the basket of pies. Mary lost sight of Georgiana.

All the desks had been removed. A line of benches and chairs and boxes ran along the walls round the room. In one corner was a stove, behind which sat a group of women with babies in their arms. Children ran everywhere, squealing, laughing, crying out their particular pleasure in this annual event.

"Unlimber thet thar fiddle," called out a lusty-lunged rider to Henry; and his call was seconded by many.

Henry Thurman sat down on a box, and bending over his fiddle, he began to saw on it. Lock Thurman sat close to him, bending forward, and with two slender pine sticks he beat time upon the strings of Henry's fiddle.

This was a signal for the dancers and the children. Forty couples and half as many youngsters began to cavort round the room. The young people danced their modification of the two-step, and the children played tag. Mary found herself swept away on Enoch's strong arm.

When finally Henry and Lock ceased their united efforts, the young people rushed outside to eat ice cream. Most of the girls forgot to put on coats, and one of these was Georgiana. In the bright glare of the fire she presented a sight calculated to be etched indelibly on the memories of the young people who saw her. The boys stared in undisguised obsession; the girls marvelled at the audacity and beauty of that white gown; the older folk looked at Georgiana with distrust and scorn.

It did not take Mary more than a moment to see that Georgiana was enjoying the sensation she created, particularly among the boys who flocked round her. Here in the bright light Mary had a good look at Hatfield. The pearl handle of a gun protruded from his right hip pocket. This surprised Mary, and she called Enoch's attention to it.

"Wal," he drawled, "I reckon Bid ain't the only one packin' hardware heah."

Mary danced four consecutive two-steps with Enoch, all long dances with innumerable encores, and then she was claimed for a dance called "tag."

Several of the boys entered this dance without partners, and they had the privilege of tagging dancers who had partners. It was a dance they all particularly enjoyed, where they began to warm up, and Mary and Georgiana had a continual procession of changing partners. Georgiana, in fact, scarcely could get started with one dancer when another dancer tagged him. Bid Hatfield was having his trouble trying to find a moment with her. At last he got hold of Mary and she found him the best dancer there. Then Enoch forced himself upon her partner.

He whispered in her ear, "Reckon I don't care for Hatfield dancin' with my girl.—An' I'm goin' to tell this outfit you're engaged to me."

The end of this dance found Mary warm, breathless, and exhausted for the moment. She was glad to rest.

When the dancers filed in again, old Henry Thurman rose, fiddle in hand, and twanged a few sharp notes to attract attention.

"Folks," he drawled, "as a member of the school board it fell on me to-night to extend a vote of thanks to our good teacher, Miss Stockwell. We shore do appreciate her. An' it was to be my pleasant duty to ask her to stay long heah with us. But thar won't be airy need of askin' now. Miss Mary has elected to make her home heah in Ton-to—an' the darn lucky man is my son Enoch."

It was then, in the few crowded ensuing moments, that Mary found how she was regarded by the children and their folk. Georgiana had not been present when the announcement was made. In the middle of the next dance, while Mary was resting and talking to Mrs. Thurman, Georgiana came hurriedly

to her, followed by Hatfield, who evidently was her partner.

"Mary—he said your engagement to Enoch was announced," she burst out.

"Who said so?" asked Mary, smiling.

"My partner—Mr. Hatfield," replied Georgiana. "I thought he was kidding me, but he swears not."

"My dear, I'm very happy to say it's the truth."

"My God! What will become of me?" muttered the girl, under her breath.

Just then, before Mary could reply, Hatfield stepped forward.

"Miss Stockwell, I congratulate you," he said. "Enoch Thurman—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of Cal, who came rushing up to Mary, to kiss her.

"Never was so—glad about anythin' in my life," he said breathlessly. "You'll be Enoch's wife an' my sister. I'll say we're lucky."

Then Cal took notice of Georgiana and Hatfield. She gave him a curt little bow and her escort spoke. Cal eyed them steadily, then without word or nod he turned his back on them. Georgiana flushed scarlet under her paint and powder.

"Come on, Bid. You sure dance divinely," she said, leaning to him and looking up into his eyes.

Hatfield was not slow or timid in his response to that invitation. But Cal apparently neither saw nor heard her.

"Dance with me, please," he asked of Mary.

"Wait for the next, Cal," she replied. "They danced me down last time, surely."

"What! The night of your engagement? Why, teacher!" returned Cal, teasingly.

"Oh, I'm not down and out, but I

need a little rest. Cal, did you ride up horseback?"

"Yep. An' after I made up my mind I came a-flyin'," replied Cal with a frank laugh.

"You said you were not coming. What brought you?" inquired Mary, in kindly curiosity.

"Well, it wasn't to have a good time. I got a hunch somethin' was comin' off an' I might be needed."

"Cal, do you mean a fight?"

"No, I reckon I wouldn't have come to get into a fight or keep anyone out."

"Cal, you said you didn't come to have a good time," spoke up Mary. "You don't mean that. You must dance and enjoy yourself."

"Teacher, my heart is broken," he replied.

"Cal, what's on your mind?"

Before he could reply Enoch loomed over them and drew them out of the crowd.

"Shore you couldn't keep out of trouble, hey?" he queried curtly, with a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"What has come off" queried Cal sharply.

"Wal, not much yet. But I reckon the ear-marks are bad," replied Enoch in serious tone. "Tim is gettin' drunk. Georgie has turned Tim down for Bid Hatfield. Tim is shore courtin' trouble. An' Tuck Merry has been a-rarin'. I didn't see him an' I cain't find him, but there's a report out heah that he's had three fights."

"Good! I'd sure like to see the three fellows."

"Whatever are you boys driving at?" asked Mary, half in alarm and half in amusement.

"Cal, I'm askin' you to stay in heah till I come back," said Enoch earnestly.

"Ahuh," replied Cal.

"Come, Mary, I want you out heah," went on Enoch, and led her out into the dark, cold night. The stars were bright above the black pines. Gay chatter and song and laughter sounded from the yellow flare of bonfire. Couples appeared to be strolling into and out of the gloom.

"Mary, when I was comin' in some one tagged me an' told me Georgie was carryin' on sort—sort of wild with Bid Hatfield," whispered Enoch, bending close to her. "Now with Tim drinkin' an' Cal heah this will never do."

"What can we do?" asked Mary.

"I reckon all we can do is to get Georgie inside and keep her there."

"I'm sure I can guarantee that," responded Mary.

"Wal, mebbe. Reckon you don't savvy Georgie. Anyway, she's out there in my car with Hatfield. An' I'm tellin' you strong we've got to break that up or somebody is goin' to—"

"Wait here. I'll go," interrupted Mary.

CHAPTER TEN

New Ways and Old

WITH mingled emotions of shame and anger Mary hurried out into the darkness to find Georgiana. She did not intend to mince matters.

There were lovers strolling to and fro under the pines, and here and there low voices coming from the darkness. Mary had some difficulty in finding Enoch's car, and it was Georgiana's voice that guided her.

"Cut it out, will you! I don't want my dress mussed any worse," Georgiana was saying.

Hatfield's reply sounded rather deep and pleasant. "Say, kid, there isn't much of it to muss."

Mary hurried up to the car. "Georgiana, get out of that car and come back into the schoolhouse," she demanded.

Hatfield released Georgiana and he stepped out of the car. Georgiana sat there a moment in silence.

"Am I a child to be ordered about?" she asked.

"Your conduct is disgraceful," replied Mary coldly. "If you have no respect for yourself, I insist that you have some for me."

"*Mary!*" cried out Georgiana.

Then without another word she flounced out and hurried toward the schoolhouse. Mary started to follow her, but was intercepted by Hatfield.

"Miss Stockwell, I reckon it's only square for me to take the blame," he said. "Georgie didn't want to come out."

"No apologies are necessary, Mr. Hatfield," replied Mary. "I do not blame you in the least. But if you are in need of advice, I would say that you are courting trouble."

"Thanks. Sure I know what I'm up against. But your sister must like me or she wouldn't stand for—for me. An' if that's so I'll fight the whole Thurman outfit."

"I agree with you," returned Mary. "But the worst of this is—Georgiana doesn't care in the least for you. I—I honestly wish she did, so that I would not be ashamed of her."

"Now look here, Miss Stockwell," he rejoined bluntly. "I'm thinkin' she couldn't go so—so far unless she cared."

"I think Georgie could," replied Mary. "I don't know, for certain, but you're welcome to what I believe. Georgie seems to be devoid of shame, of

conscience—not to say more. She's just playing with you."

"You say that—her sister?" he queried, with a catch in his breath.

"Yes. I believe it. I don't want to be unkind to you or unjust to her. But the situation is bad, you must admit."

"I reckon it is. Mebbe worse than you think," he muttered.

"I've no more to say, Mr. Hatfield," added Mary, moving away.

"You've said a heap. You've showed me a hoss of another color. I'm thankin' you an' I'm sorry she's your sister. If you'll take a hunch from me, you'll send her back where she belongs."

Mary hurriedly returned toward the schoolhouse. Hatfield did not appear to be such a bad sort, and probably a really good girl might have done wonders for him. His last words troubled her exceedingly. Indeed, the girl did not fit here among these people.

Then Enoch loomed over Mary and his hard hand, seeking hers, seemed something to cling to.

They entered the schoolhouse to find the dance at last in full swing. The children were all asleep in the two corners reserved for them. The old folk were looking on and chatting. Henry Thurman had warmed up to his fiddling job. And the young people were settling down to real dancing, as Enoch put it.

After that dance came an intermission during which the ladies served sandwiches, cake, and pie. Every seat round the room was occupied, and many were standing. It was possible now for Mary to look about and see whom she recognized. She was really surprised at the pleasure of the moment. But for the undercurrent of suppressed feeling that had communicated itself to her, this dance would have been singularly happy. Still, she was

happy anyhow, she argued with herself. But there was a bitter drop in her cup.

Henry Thurman brought the intermission to an end with a twang of his fiddle.

"Rustle yore pardners now," he called. "I'm a fiddlin' fool an' I'm lookin' to see some of these heah long-legged riders danced down."

A shout greeted Henry's speech. Evidently it was a challenge put forward by the girls and accepted by the boys. The music started and the dancers took to the floor with a rush. Mary had that dance with Enoch, and the next she promised to Tuck Merry.

"Oh—it's good—I don't have—to walk to school—tomorrow," she said breathlessly to her last partner, when the music finally stopped.

"Sure you'll be right here," he replied. "This dance won't break up till breakfast. Your scholars are all present right now an' most of them asleep."

From that hour Mary became a spectator. The dance went on and grew in every sense from the fiddling of old Henry to the action and endurance of the participants. Gradually, however, the married couples withdrew, leaving the floor to the young folk. All during the evening Mary had heard the occasional monotonous sing-song voice of the old fiddler as he called out something she could not distinguish. But now she had opportunity to listen, and she grew much interested and amused.

"Cinch 'em tight

An' swing all night—

Tee dell de tee dell de."

Every few moments Henry would break out with one of his improvisations.

"Serge's mad an' I can see

Trouble ahead 'twixt him an' Lee."

This brought forth shouts of approval and inspired Henry to greater heights.

"Edd's shore a-walkin' on air

An' all the while trompin' on Clair."

Edd Thurman was the giant of the assembly and danced like a lumbering rhinoceros. A huge laugh went up at his expense. Henry was quiet for a long time, his grizzled head bent over his fiddle, and he had a manner of profound meditation.

"Merc an' Merth are pretty little twins.

Go to it boys an' see who wins."

That seemed to exhaust the old fiddler for a long spell. When at length he raised his head to call out again, it was in stronger voice:

"I'm the fiddlest fool

Full of White Mule."

Then after a full pause, as if for effect, he roared out:

"Listen, boys, an' heah this verse.

Some of you go out an' fetch a hearse.

Tuck Merry's slammed three of our best;

It'll never do till he meets the rest."

At this hour, which was about three o'clock in the morning, the enjoyment and excitement of the dance appeared to be at its height. The dancing had become almost continuous. Henry Thurman gathered strength and enthusiasm as the hours wore away. The boys took turns beating with the little sticks upon the strings of his fiddle.

Mary, happening to remember the untoward fears of the early evening, remarked to Enoch that apparently she had exaggerated the possibilities of trouble.

"Wal, it's only the shank of the evenin' yet," he replied enigmatically.

"What do you mean?"

"Shore I cain't say. But none of us older folks like your sister's dancin'."

"Oh!" cried Mary in dismay. "I was—worried. But Georgiana has been dancing very—very decorously for her."

"Reckon she has up to this heah dance. Take a look at her."

Mary was not long in picking out her sister's lithe, supple, wiggling form. Her partner was Dick Thurman, the youngest of the family, and he was one, Mary remembered, that Georgiana had coached in the new Eastern dances. She bent, she swayed, she gyrated, and seemed to inspire her partner to be oblivious of all save her.

"Wal, that wouldn't be so damn bad if Georgie was dressed different," muttered Enoch, as if correcting his own judgment.

Mary endeavored to catch Georgiana's eye. This appeared to be impossible. Georgiana apparently had no eyes for anybody except her partner. Yet of course she must have been aware of the sensation she was creating.

"Wal, I'll be doggoned!" burst out Enoch. "She's got some of the kids doin' it."

When Mary verified the truth of Enoch's observation her dismay increased. Three young couples had begun to dance in a way calculated to excite mirth and disgust. Their intentions were plain, but their execution was ridiculous. Georgiana's dancing had grace, rhythm, and beauty despite the quality that was objectionable. Many couples left off dancing the better to watch this new and bewildering style. Gradually Georgiana and her pupils drew the attention of old and young alike. There was no mistaking the undisguised disapproval of the mothers and fathers present, nor any doubt about the young people being fascinated.

That dance ended, to Mary's infinite relief. Then she asked Enoch if it would not be wise for her to seek Georgiana, though not to compel attention, and advise against any further dancing of that kind.

"Let her jump the corral bars!" ejaculated Enoch.

His reply silenced Mary and made her more thoughtful than ever. It might be just as well to let the willful Georgiana have her own sweet way. Mary felt a growing anger toward her sister.

There was the usual short intermission, in the middle of which Bid Hatfield swaggered across the empty floor and went straight to Georgiana, manifestly to claim her for the next dance.

"Wal, I reckon Bid ain't to be blamed much, but it's sort of hard luck for him," spoke up Enoch.

"Why—hard luck?" faltered Mary. When had she ever seen Enoch's eyes flash like gray lightning or his lean jaw bulge and set hard as flint?

"Mary, you know we Thurmans fight among ourselves—at a toss-up—just for the fun of it. But we're shore slow to fight with outsiders. Hatfield has gotten away with a lot of stunts—slapped right in our faces. It looks like Georgie has given Cal a dirty deal. So has Hatfield. If they have the nerve to dance that—that crazy stuff together, it'll break up—"

The loud discordant twang of old Henry's fiddle interrupted the conclusion of Enoch's statement. This time, for some strange reason, the couples were slow to get into the dance. This tardiness gave Georgiana and Hatfield an opportunity they were not slow to grasp. They started off in a close embrace and with swaying motion Mary knew had never before been seen on

that floor. Critically she watched them. Either Hatfield had been more carefully instructed or had taken to this style of dancing more skillfully than the others who had essayed it. For he presented an admirable partner for Georgiana. They both did very well indeed what never should have been done at all.

Mary looked up at Enoch and was relieved to find him smiling as he watched. He was as broad-minded and kindly as he was forceful. Then Mary glanced from Enoch to the older Thurmans near at hand. She could not discern any difference in their demeanor. But presently, the stalwart Gard Thurman, the uncle of Cal, got up and strode along between the dancers and the wall until he reached old Henry.

Suddenly the fiddling stopped so shortly that everybody seemed startled into an expectant pause. Gard Thurman stood up on a box, high above the dancers.

"Folks an' friends," he began in a sonorous drawl, "before we go any farther with this heah dance, I've got a word to say. We've had good times heah in this old schoolhouse, an' many an' many a dance. Wal, I reckon these dances hev'n't been much to brag about, but they've always been decent an' they're always goin' to be decent. An' I'm statin' flat thet no outsider can come in heah an' make our dances indecent. Thet's all. I'm sayin' this as a gentleman an' allowin' fer the foolishness of young folks. But there won't no more be said."

A blank silence followed the conclusion of Gard Thurman's speech. Then he stepped down and his brother Henry began to fiddle valiantly, as if to make up for lost time and an embarrassing moment. Again the dancers fell

into their shuffling, rhythmic movements.

But Georgiana and her partner did not dance again. Mary's keen eye followed them out of the throng to the comparative seclusion of a far corner, where they evidently talked with their backs to the dancers. Soon Georgiana wheeled about and came hurriedly down the room, to the corner where the coats and wraps had been left. Hatfield followed her.

Mary left her own seat, and in going round the room she lost sight of Georgiana for the time being. When Mary reached the far end of the long room, near the door, she found Enoch there, talking earnestly to Cal. As soon as he saw Mary he discontinued whatever he was saying.

Georgiana appeared in the act of dismissing Hatfield. He looked angry. She did not deign him so much as a glance, and she turned toward the door. She had put on her heavy coat, and she was tying a white fleecy shawl over her head. She came straight for the group in front of the door. At sight of her face Mary's anger softened.

"Georgie, where are you going?" she asked hurriedly.

Georgiana walked straight to Cal and looked up at him. "Cal, will you take me home?" she asked in low but distinct voice. "Tim is drunk. I'm afraid of Hatfield. There isn't anyone else I'd ask—except you. Will you take me?"

Mary felt Enoch's strong hand squeezing hers. What an opportunity for the flouted and scorned boy! He could have his bitter-sweet revenge right then.

"Why sure I'll take you home," replied Cal, with dark, steady eyes on hers. "I came to take you home."

Then in the quick break of Georgiana's composure was a proof that she had not in the least been sure of his chivalry. But, womanlike, in the hour of stress she had put him to the test. She dropped her head. Perhaps only his loyalty could have shamed her.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Biff—Biff—Biff—Wham!"

IT WAS the noon hour up at Rock Spring Mesa, and the December sun shone so pleasantly that the men ate in their shirt sleeves.

According to the men, Cal Thurman had chosen the finest site in the Tonto for his homestead. It appeared high above the rolling black-timbered land of the Basin, yet it lay far below the lofty level Rim. In reality it was not a mesa, for it had only three sides. The fourth was a level extension meeting the cedar-sloped Promontory would have been a more felicitous name. It was a wide flat-topped bench, covered with cedar, juniper, and some pine, that extended out over the Basin farther and higher than other benches which ran down from the Rim.

A yellow rocky bluff stood out blunt and ragged at the end of the level, where mesa met the slope, and here under the cliff bubbled the famed spring that gave the place its name.

"Shore the wind's going to blow logs right out of yore cabin," said Gard Thurman.

"I reckon it's got to be darn strong an' heavy," was old Henry's reply to this.

"Wal," drawled Wess, "we can snake big logs down heah an' we can heave

them into a cabin no north wind'll bother, but Cal himself has shore got to find an' keep what goes along with homesteadin'."

"Time enough for that," broke in Cal gruffly. "But if you men eat an' gab all day long we'll never get the cabin run up."

"My son, learn to be patient," replied old Henry kindly. "Shore there's no hurry. You've got the land, an' now you've all the time there is."

Cal strode away from the camp, out along the edge of the cleared land, through the odorous green-and-brown belt of timber to the edge of the mesa. Here had been a favorite outlook of his as long as he could remember. When he was ten years old he had played there and pretended to build his cabin.

The outlook was superb. It was so high that he could see Gard Thurman's ranch, a bare gray patch in the black, and his father's place, Green Valley, far down over the rolling dark foothills, and Bear Flat Ranch, and Boyd's sorg'-hum field, all of which appeared cleared specks of ground in all that wilderness of tumbled ridges leading down into the purple Basin. Beyond towered the mountain ranges. Behind and far above loomed the beautiful Rim, a zig-zagged belt of golden cliff fringed by pine, and stretched to west and east as far as eye could see. The great black notched canyon between Promontory Point and the Rim lay open and clear to Cal's right, a jungle of timber and jumble of cliff where wild creatures always found safe refuge.

"I'd like to be there now—hid from everybody," he muttered darkly.

For Rock Spring Mesa and the homestead had strangely lost their glamour.

Cal had not been down to Green Valley for a month. He longed to see Georgiana, but pride kept him from going.

Not since the October dance, from which he had taken her home, disgraced in her own sight, had he been with her. All the way home on that memorable ride through the forest she had scarcely spoken a word.

Upon arriving at Green Valley she had left the car at the gate, saying, "You need not go in. I thank you, Cal Thurman. I'll say I've misjudged you. I'm not worth your respect—nor anything else. Good night."

"Aw, Georgie, don't talk like that. Wait!" he had implored. But she had fled. And he had not set eyes upon her for a week afterward. Then she seemed changed. When he did make opportunity for her to speak, to right the wrong she had done him, she talked only of casual things, and soon found excuse to leave him. And in the succeeding weeks they had drifted farther apart.

When the weeks passed and gradually Georgiana had come back to friendly acceptance of attention from the boys, though colder, it seemed to him, then Cal could no longer endure the situation. He won his father to instant execution of the homestead plan, and now he had been away a month. Enoch and his riders had returned from the Winslow cattle-drive, and were now helping hew the logs for his cabin. In another day the logs would be notched and flattened, ready to be raised into the finest cabin ever built under the Rim.

Nevertheless, Cal was bitterly unhappy. He could not stand it much longer. Almost desperate, he sat there on the rocky edge, under the juniper tree that seemed an old friend.

He gazed out over the rugged range-encompassed Basin, so wild and lonely and free, a mountain fastness once the home of the fierce Apache, and now sparsely settled by the Thurmans and

pioneer families like them. Here was the place and now was the time. All that he lacked was Georgiana Stockwell. In a kind of dream or trance then, as he closed his eyes, it came to him—what must be done to save himself. He must have her. That was all. It did not matter what she had done or what she was or what she wanted.



Sixteen men, all of them Thurmans, heaved the notched logs for Cal's cabin.

"One — two — three — all together — heave!" called out old Henry, and the straight fine logs of pine went into place as if by magic.

It was to be a cabin like Gard Thurman's, in fact, two cabins with one roof. The rooms were fifteen feet in width, twenty feet in length, and the space between them was to serve as a covered porch. Burros had for days been packing lumber from Henry's sawmill—boards for floors and doors and casements and closets. The four windows had come from Globe, and had been entrusted to old Jinny, the safest packer of the burros. Slender poles of pine had been cut to point the gable roof, that was to extend clear across both rooms and the intervening space. A fine-grained pine tree had yielded the shingles—"shakes," they were called—and these were piled neatly near by, ready for the shinglers.

One Saturday noon, close to Christmas, old Henry wiped the sweat from his wrinkled brow and called to the few Thurmans he had kept to finish the job, "Done, you sons-of-guns, an' shore she's a daisy!"

Such a double cabin had no counterpart in all the Tonto. The wide shelving eaves sheltered a porch all along the front. There was a ladder leading to the loft above the space between the cabins—ample room for storage or for sleeping-quarters. An open fireplace of stone on the west side was Henry's especial pride. It would hold as large a fire-log as a man would care to lift. Homemade furniture, rude but serviceable, such as tables, chairs, bedsteads, had been made.

"Boy, yore homestead is ready," said Henry to his son. "Come down to Green Valley for Christmas. Then we'll pack up yore outfit, an' a stove for the kitchen, an' a lot of grub. I'll give you some hosses an cattle—an', wal, I reckon thet's about all I can do for you."

"Cal, when you fetch yourself a woman we'll shore storm this heah cabin," remarked Edd.

Serge got an elaborate dinner that day, to celebrate the occasion and to use all the food he had left, so there would be none to pack away. Naturally the hour was somewhat hilarious, and Cal was indeed thankful for the advent of Tuck Merry. He rode a rather small horse, and his long legs, dangling down, excited the humor of the boys. They left off teasing Cal.

"Some mansion, I'll say," declared Tuck, gazing at the new cabin. "Buddy, don't you forget that I sawed a lot of wood for you."

They ate and talked, and bantered Tuck, and lay around until there did not seem any possible excuse to do so longer. Besides, all the food had disappeared, Enoch finally put on his chaps and his fleece-lined coat, and yelled for one of the Thurman youngsters to fetch his horse.

"Reckon I'll ride home an' call it a

day," he drawled, "Cal, will you be rustlin' along?"

"Sure, tonight. I—I want to hang around an' talk to Tuck for a while," replied Cal.

"Ahuh! Shore I s'pose your long-legged pard has a lot to talk about," returned Enoch dryly.

"Right-o," declared Tuck heartily. "And say, Enoch, stop kidding me about my long legs. You're not so short-armed or legged or necked. And you've the longest nose—the most fascinating nose—I ever saw."

Everybody sat up to take notice. Old Henry haw-hawed his amusement. Enoch looked surprised.

"Longest—an' most fascinatin'," he echoed dubiously. "What you mean by fascinatin'?"

At that juncture Cal shot a look at Tuck. They understood each other.

"Why Enoch, your nose is fascinating for two reasons," replied Tuck slowly. "First, it's so darned big and ugly."

"Ugly! Say, you shore have a lot of beauty to brag about," retorted Enoch.

"Enoch, I'm a handsome man compared to you," rejoined Tuck tranquilly. "But I'll say if it wasn't for your nose you might stand a chance with me."

"My Gawd!" ejaculated Enoch. "Listen to him, fellers! I'll—But say, what's that other reason why my nose is so fascinatin'?"

"Because it'd be such a peach of a nose to jab," replied Tuck with a broad smile.

"Ahuh! Wal, I noticed you never busted off any buttons acceptin' invitations to punch my nose."

"Right-o," replied Tuck coolly. "But, Enoch, old scout, it wasn't because I didn't want to. Honest, I've near died

of temptation. I sure wanted to tap that beautiful bugle of yours."

"What kept you from tryin'?" queried Enoch.

"Can I speak right out before everybody?"

"Shore you can," blurted Enoch, more mystified than ever.

"Good! It will take a load off my mind," returned Tuck seriously. "Your fiancée, Miss Mary, begged me not to cross you or annoy you or even answer you back. She was afraid I might make you angry. Said you were so big and strong that you would hurt me terribly. Said you would lick me very bad and she didn't want to see me all crippled up. So I had to promise her I'd not offend you. It's been pretty hard, Enoch."

Cal burst out into long-suppressed mirth. The other boys yelled. Old Henry had not quite grasped the situation, but he had begun to beam. Enoch was the only one who did not see the joke.

"Wal, I reckon Mary had it sized up correct. If you'd ever give me a chance I'd shore have licked you very bad."

Tuck took a long stride toward Enoch. He had the grave concern of a deacon.

"Enoch, you're a good old scout, and I hate to do this," he said.

"You dinged fool!" shouted Enoch, beginning to grow red in the face. The mirth of the spectators, especially Cal's, began to get on his nerves.

Suddenly Tuck Merry bounded straight up, to come down light as a feather.

"*You big stiff!*" he thundered. "You've been bully-ragging me ever since I got here. Climb out of your chaps! Throw off your coat!"

Enoch's face changed miraculously.

"Wal, Tuck, shore I reckon I won't need to take off anythin'," he drawled.

He stepped toward Tuck with his slow, sturdy, belligerent manner.

Cal had eyes dimmed by tears of glee, but he saw something flash, quick as light. It was Tuck's long arm. Enoch staggered and had to throw up his arms to try to regain his balance. He never regained it. Sharp thumped Tuck's left fist where the right hand had landed. Enoch let out a bellow which resembled that of a steer in pain and fury. Then again Tuck's left followed hard. Enoch began to lean exactly like a huge tree cut at the roots. At the same time Tuck was swinging with his right—a longer and more powerful action than Cal had ever seen him use. It thrilled Cal, and frightened him, too. That blow sent Enoch down like a heavy sack.

"He's out," said Tuck, breathing hard. "I had to make it a knockout or he'd pestered me to fight every day."

They all knelt beside Enoch, and someone threw water on his face. His nose was swelling rapidly, but did not bleed very much. Presently he began to revive. He opened his eyes, blinked, stared, and then slowly stirred, and reaching for support he sat up. Cal backed away from him, and Tuck rose to stand aside. Enoch seemed a little dazed. He shook his head and felt of his jaw.

"Ahuh! He licked me!" he said, in the strangest tone.

"Wal, I reckon he did," drawled Henry.

"Terrible bad!" went on Enoch.

"Say, if you could see yore beak, you'd think so," declared Serge.

"Awful quick!" added Enoch.

"Biff—biff—biff—wham!— Just as quick as thet," replied old Henry with a grin. "Prettiest work I ever seen."

Enoch slowly got to his feet and

stood rather unsteadily. But he was again in possession of all his faculties. Cal picked up his sombrero and gave it to him. Someone else began to brush his coat.

"Tuck Merry, when I invited you to a little mix-up, I reckoned it'd be one-sided," said Enoch, getting back to his drawl. "It shore was! I'm licked, an' I can swallow it if you'll tell me how you did it."

Cal felt that he was the one to make the revelation.

"Enoch—listen," he began, choking his words out. "Tuck was a boxing-master among the marines. An' he was—one of Jack Dempsey's sparrin' partners!"

"My Gawd!" ejaculated Enoch, suddenly radiant, as he reached for Tuck. "I can tell Mary that."

CHAPTER TWELVE

"Some Little Santa Claus!"

THE men packed their tools and effects kept there during the building, and rode away, leaving Cal with his friend.

Tuck had to see everything and his interest was stimulating. They went all over the cabin, up into the lofts, and then out into the cleared field, where the stumps were still burning. Tuck had to have a drink of the spring, and he was loud in his praise of everything.

"Is there any more to see?" he asked finally.

"Guess you've given it the once-over, except my lookout point. It's as high as the fire ranger's station on the Diamond," replied Cal.

"Lead me to it," said Tuck.

Whereupon Cal led him across the field of red soil, into the timber and out to the promontory. The day was unusually fine and clear.

"You can't often see the Sierra Ancas in winter," said Cal, pointing to the most distant range, far to the south.

Tuck gazed from far to near and near to far, and then all around.

"Buddy, for a city man that is beyond words. Just grand!—You won't be bothered by gasoline smell here or rattle of the elevated or second-story burglars—or bill collectors, or anything! To make it perfect you need only—"

"What?" queried Cal, as his friend hesitated.

"Georgiana Stockwell," replied Tuck deliberately.

At that Cal suddenly sat down on the flat stone under the juniper.

"Pard," he said, with lowered head, "you're hittin' below the belt."

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Tuck, with his long arm going round Cal's shoulder. "I came up today on purpose to tell you that, and I expected to see you duck. But don't feel bad, Cal."

"Tuck, you said—for my homestead to be perfect, it needed Georgiana Stockwell," returned Cal. "Yes. It would be. But without her it will be nothin'."

"I can see that, Cal," rejoined Tuck thoughtfully. "It is in your face, and you've lost weight."

"Still, I'm not nearly so far down as I was. I've made a decision, an' in a way it's helped."

"What was it, Cal?"

"I reckon it was something' like what you said—I've got to have Georgie. The Thurmans are like that. Think! With a world full of nice women—only one will do."

"It's tough," replied Tuck seriously.

"Especially, as you're a Thurman, who won't try to win the one woman."

"Try!—Why, Tuck, you're crazy," declared Cal. "I've crawled on my knees."

"Sure. But, Buddy, you didn't crawl at the right time, nor far enough. And you expected Georgie to crawl. That kid crawl! Never in this wide world!—But she could be scared into 'most anything."

"Scare Georgie!" echoed Cal. "That couldn't be done. She has more nerve than anyone I ever knew. Besides, what use to scare her?"

"We'll come to that presently. Now what I want to get straight is this. I haven't seen you for several weeks, and during that time I figured you'd brace, take the count, and get back into the ring again. But you haven't. You've quit. And I'm fearing it's worse with you than I'd guessed.—Tell me, Buddy."

"Worse? I reckon it couldn't be worse," rejoined Cal, somberly. "I—I thought my heart was broken. I don't know. But I feel I'm ruined unless—"

"Right-o. I get you, pard. Just what seems to be wrong between you and Georgie?"

"I guess she doesn't care, that's all," replied Cal dejectedly.

"But she did—as much as her kind ever cares for any fellow. They got to be handed a couple, her kind, before they are gentle. She'll never care any more unless you make her. And I think this absent treatment of yours had made her care less. If you don't do something quick you're going to lose her."

"What on earth can I do?" blurted out Cal, goaded to desperation.

"It's a case of roughhouse," replied Tuck, with a grin.

"You mean run off with her—kidnap her?" demanded Cal incredulously.

"Not exactly. That's too gentle for Georgiana. I'd waylay her—grab her—make a bluff at being a gorilla—scare her into the middle of next week—and marry her before she came to."

"Aw, Tuck—you're crazy!" breathed Cal hopelessly. "She'd have to consent to marriage."

"Right-o. But you can scare her into that. Cal, if you've got to have your little lady, let's get our heads together and plan the great razoo."

"I'd do anything that wasn't dishonorable," replied Cal.

"Listen, then, and don't butt in till I get this off my chest," went on Tuck. "I've kept close tab on Georgiana and all that concerned her these last four weeks. You know she came here for her health and improved wonderfully at first. Well, now she's going back. She doesn't ride and run around in the open as before. This sort of thing can't last. Miss Mary has lost patience with her, which is no wonder. And of course since the dance scandal the Thurmans are a little chilly. The situation is bad for Georgie. Everybody misunderstands your attitude. Think you, too, have thrown her down. Such gossip gets to her ears. I dare say Georgie imagines she hates you now. I know when I mention you she blazes like fire. But maybe that's a good sign. It wouldn't do, though, for you to go hon-eyeing around her. Well, last week Bid Hatfield called at your house to see Georgie."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Cal.

"Yes, I do say. He didn't get to see Georgie, but he left a note, which was given to her. That wasn't so bad. But twice this week I've seen Hatfield ride down that hill trail below the sawmill. Twice, in the middle of the afternoon. Well, by inquiring casual-like of Miss

Mary, I found out that Georgie has been taking walks, when the afternoons are sunny, and—”

“Tuck! Has she been meeting Bid Hatfield?” queried Cal tensely.

“If she hasn’t, it’s a cinch she soon will meet him.”

“Tuck, if that happens, an’ my folks hear of it, Georgie won’t be welcome at my home any longer.”

“Right-o. I had that figured. Here are the facts. Georgie is in bad here in the Tonto. She knows it. She feels she has hurt her sister’s position. It has worried her, and what with that and all the rest, she’s on the downhill road, in health and every way. Now let’s change all that for her.”

“All right. But how?” queried Cal eagerly.

“I’ve figured it all out, Buddy,” continued Tuck, just as eagerly. “The Sunday after Christmas I’ll ride down to get Parson Meeker. I’ve met him a few times, and think he likes me. Anyway, I can handle him. I’ll make up some story that will get his sympathy. In the Tonto, you know, anybody can get married quick if he fetches the lady. That’ll be your job, and if I’m not mistaken it’ll be *some* job. Now I’ll fetch Parson Meeker by trail, round the Diamond to Boyd Thurman’s cabin. No one living there, and if it’s cold we can make a fire. We’ll be there about noon Monday, and wait for you.”

“What have I got to do?”

“Grab the little lady and tote her up there—and we’ll do the rest,” declared Tuck.

“Wha-at?” stammered Cal.

“Buddy, you’re like Enoch after I gave him the slumber-whanger. Listen. All you’ve got to do is to catch Georgie out of the house or drag her out of the house. Have a horse handy, hidden in

the brush. Carry her if you have to. You want to act mad, quick, and rough. Scare her into the middle of next week.”

“It’s easy to talk of scarin’ Georgie, but how can it be done?” asked Cal wildly.

“You’re afraid of her. Well, make her afraid of you. Act like some of the Tonto outlaws she’s heard about. Make her think she has driven you to it. Then make her swear not to tell Parson Meeker you carried her off.”

“Ahuh! An’ then, supposin’ all this—this dream comes off, an’ I do get her married—what then?” asked Cal.

“Pack her up here to your new cabin. You can have all shipshape by that time.”

“An’ then—after I pack her up here—what’ll I say?” asked Cal feebly.

“Let me see,” replied this arbiter of wisdom reflectively. “I think I’d make a grand finale of it. I’d *carry* her in and drop her down and say, in a big loud voice, ‘Now, Mrs. Cal Thurman, I want my dinner. I’m not in a mood to sing for it or whistle for it, but I *want* it!’ Then go out, and let her come to.”

Cal shook his head sadly at what he considered the mental aberration of his friend. If he did succeed in forcing Georgiana to marry him, there was no possibility of keeping her a prisoner.

“Buddy, don’t overlook this fact,” put in Tuck, as if he read Cal’s thoughts. “Once you marry Georgie, she’ll not find it so easy to get out of as you think now, and as she’ll think. Nobody is going to believe you kidnaped her, and if she runs off from you, she’ll disgrace her sister sure this time.”

That idea struck home to Cal’s grasping hope. It would be a serious situation for Georgiana. The most alluring prospect was the fact that, married, she

would be saved from herself, so far as the Tonto was concerned, no matter what she did.

"Next Monday! Five more days! My God!" ejaculated Cal.

"Buddy, so help me, it'll work out fine," responded Tuck, with great relief and satisfaction. "By springtime you and I will sit right here under this old juniper, and you'll be telling Tuck Mertry he's square with you."

Cal rode back to Green Valley that afternoon late, a very much obsessed young man, pondering the part he had to play. His morbid depression had vanished.

It was dark when he and Tuck reached Green Valley. All the riders were in, judging from the saddles on the rack. Before presenting himself indoors, he went with Tuck to their tent quarters, and there, by the light of a candle, he shaved and changed his clothes.

Supper had been held for his arrival and the boys greeted him with a yell and a rush to the table. His mother remarked that he "shore looked sort of pasty," and his sister asked him if he thought it was Sunday, "All cleaned up an' shiny-faced."

Mary Stockwell and Georgiana came in to take their seats at the far end of the long table. When they saw Cal they added their greeting. Georgiana called, "Howdy Cal! You shore don't look like you been a-rollin' logs."

Cal bent over his plate. How the sweet high voice shook his heart! He did not glance at Georgiana again during that merry suppertime, and when they repaired to the living-room, she did not stay. Mary came to shake hands with him.

"How are you, Cal?" was her kind

query, and her eyes searched his face anxiously.

"Fair to middlin', teacher," he replied gayly. "An' when's the great day for you an' Enoch? I have my mind on a weddin' present."

"I'll tell you when it's decided," she replied.

"How's Georgie?" he went on, trying to be casual.

"Georgie seems well enough, but she grows thinner and paler. I am worried, Cal. She—But I'll not tell you now. Sometime soon when we have a good chance."

"All right, teacher. Anythin' I can do—you know me," he said soberly.

The next day Cal borrowed Tuck's services at the sawmill, and the two of them drove to Ryson and filled a car full of supplies and utensils needed at the Rock Spring homestead and also Christmas presents. They returned to Green Valley, and spent the remaining hour of that day stowing away these purchases.

The following morning Cal and Tuck, with the help of some of the boys, packed nineteen burros and horses. By noon that day they unpacked in front of the porch of Cal's new home. They had a good deal of excitement in spreading the outfit and finding where every bit of it should be placed. Midafternoon overtook them before this pleasant labor was ended; and then followed the task of finding the strayed pack animals and driving them home. They arrived at Green Valley just before dark, tired out but happy, and ready for their great adventure.

Christmas Eve found twenty-odd Thurmans at the Green Valley Ranch. And what with Mary Stockwell and Georgiana, added to the several riders who likewise were no kin of the Thurmans, there was a large household

Cal sprang a little surprise on them. That day at Ryson, in the excitement of purchasing and the thrill of possible events he had bought presents for everybody. The amazement and delight of his rider brothers was gratifying. His old father scratched his grizzled head, and gazed dubiously from the present on his knee up into Cal's face.

"Son, air this heah yore way of home-steadin' a ranch?"

"Ahuh! Maybe next Christmas I won't be able to afford it," he replied mysteriously.

At last there was only one present left, and Cal meant this for Georgiana. He had not been unaware of her curiosity, even though she sat in the back-ground and had no share in the hilarity.

So he stood with the box behind his back and called out gayly:

"Come, Georgie, get yours."

She came forward readily, not at all formidable. Indeed she was smiling, a little wistfully, yet expectantly. She came right up to him and the light of the blazing logs in the open fireplace shone on her face. Cal trembled, and found it hard to keep to his role of gay dispenser of gifts. He almost forgot.

"I'll say you're some little Santa Claus," said Georgiana.

"Guess what it is," suggested Cal.

"Oh, I couldn't. I haven't an idea."

"I'll bet you'll be tickled," he went on tantalizingly. "I was just lucky. This sure was a windfall."

"Well, give it to me then—if it's so wonderful," retorted Georgiana, pleasurable anticipation in her face.

"Huyler's candy—from New York!" announced Cal triumphantly, and handed over the box.

"Oh! Really? How perfectly lovely!" cried Georgiana, suddenly radiant, as she eagerly received the gift.

"Georgie, I wish you a Merry Christmas—an' a Happy New Year here—in the Tonto," added Cal, with a strange earnestness taking the place of his gayety.

"Thank you. I wish you the same," she replied, dark eyes on his for an instant. Then she turned to her sister.



Christmas day, and the Sunday following were nightmares to Cal. He managed to do justice to the sumptuous Tonto dinner, including wild turkey, but the rest of the festivities and social intercourse of the holiday were blank for him. Not until Tuck Merry rode away late Sunday afternoon did Cal regain anything of balance. Then his queer trancelike vacillation gave way to an intense nervous restlessness. Not much sleep did he get that night!

As luck would have it Monday turned out to be a beautiful bright sunny day. Nature had smiled upon his enterprise. About the middle of the forenoon he saddled his horse, and riding out the back way he circled over a brushy ridge and came down above the ranch, at a point where the walnut swale joined the road. Here back a few rods he tied his horse and returned to the house.

All the men had resumed their labors after the short holiday. Mary Stockwell had disappeared somewhere, Cal's mother and sisters were busy in their quarters. He felt sure that Georgiana would walk out into the sunshine but even if she did not the conditions were favorable to the success of his venture.

Donning the roughest clothes he had

—in fact, ragged old garments he had cast aside, he made a bundle of the things he had taken off. He packed a big gun at his hip. And with his old slouch sombrero he imagined he made a rather hard-looking individual.

He went out and hid in the brush above the house, and with eyes that ached he peered from his covert. He would have an interminable wait. Endless hours before she would come out for her walk! Or she might not come at all, and then he would be forced to go after her. The excitement, the thrill, the zest of the thing had vanished. There was a lump in his throat; his skin felt clammy and cold; and his restlessness increased until it became almost unbearable.

All at once his roving eye caught sight of a horseman riding down a brush-lined trail across the valley.

"Who's that man?" muttered Cal grimly. "I'm not goin' to let him spoil my party. Maybe he'll ride on."

The horseman kept to the brush, disappeared for a few moments, then reappeared farther down, and came off the slope at the end of the Thurman line of cleared ground. Here he kept under cover until he got out to the road, where he was careful to look in all directions. Cal began to breathe hard. The horseman trotted briskly down the road, and turned into the clump of walnut trees in the mouth of the swale where Cal had hidden his horse.

"Bid Hatfield!" gasped Cal, and slowly sank back in his hiding-place.

This accident presented a new angle to his enterprise. He was expecting Georgiana to go out for a walk. So was Bid Hatfield. Confronted by this problem, Cal pondered over it. At the same time he peered again from his shady

nook under the manzanitas. Suddenly he stiffened in his tracks. Georgiana had appeared at the gate, and her quick apprehensive glance up and down the road was not lost upon Cal.

"Ah hell!" he groaned. Georgiana knew Bid Hatfield was to be there. She was on the way to meet him. One moment Cal endured pangs the like of which had never before torn his breast. Then swift as light his whole mood changed.

"Ahuh!" he muttered hoarsely. "I'll meet him too, Georgie—an' you can take your choice."

Slipping down like an Indian through the brush, Cal halted just before he came to the road. Georgiana was walking rapidly toward the curve of the road, around which was the opening where Hatfield must be waiting. Cal let her get out of sight. Then he ran along, threading a way through the aisles between the clumps of brush, and turned to climb a low ridge that formed the western bank of the walnut swale. He was in the grip of passion, yet he had self-control left to let the meeting decide his course of action.

Through an opening in the trees below he caught a glimpse of Georgiana, still hurrying. He glided after her, keeping clumps of brush in front of him. Presently, he caught the brown gleam of Hatfield's bay horse, and next he saw Hatfield sitting on a log, waiting. He saw Georgiana coming. How eager his attitude! Cal ground his teeth in jealous rage. Perhaps the fellow had reason to look happily expectant. They had chosen the thickest part of this swale for their meeting-place.

Cal crouched down and covered considerable ground before he looked again. He was now close enough to

make up his mind what to do. With tense eyes he peered out.

When Hatfield attempted to take the girl in his arms and she repulsed him in a manner unquestionable, Cal experienced another terrible commotion in his breast. She should not have been there, but perhaps there were extenuating circumstances. Cal's keen eyes searched Hatfield's person for a gun. None was visible.

Drawing his gun, Cal glided on, keeping to cover, stepping stealthily. But he need not have taken so much precaution. Hatfield was appealing in poignant tones: "Aw, Georgie, you don't mean it."

"Yes, I do," replied Georgiana, almost sharply. "I've been out of my head—long enough. It's wrong to meet you. It'd be wrong if I loved you—which I don't. I'll never—"

Cal called out, stridently, "Stick 'em up, Bid—*Quick!*"

Hatfield's back was turned to Cal. Up went his hands and he stood stiff. Georgiana wheeled to see Cal and let out a startled scream.

"Shut up, you!" ordered Cal, in a voice like a whip.

Then, turning round in front of Hatfield he shoved the gun full in that worthy's face. A sweeping glance assured Cal that his rival was unarmed.

"Reckon I'll kill you!" he hissed out, with all the fury he could summon. He must have done it well, for Hatfield turned a sickly pale hue, and Georgiana screamed in terror.

"For God's sake, Cal—don't—don't kill him!" she begged frantically.

"Why not? You're meetin' him here—sneakin' away from the house where you're a guest—insultin' every Thurman in the Tonto—disgracin' your sister. You must love him."

"Oh, Cal—I swear I don't!" cried the girl, with ashen face. "I've been lonely—miserable. I met him first by accident. He coaxed me, and I was just—just bull-headed enough to come. I was foolish—but I don't care for him. I never even thought so."

"You met him—like this—an' that's enough for a Thurman," replied Cal harshly.

"But Hatfield is not to blame," cried the girl. "I am to blame. Put down that awful gun."

In her earnestness she pressed forward as if to take hold of Cal. With one swing of his left arm he swung her off. She staggered against the log and all but fell. Her hand went to her breast; her lips parted and her eyes grew wild.

"Hatfield—get on your horse an' beat it," ordered Cal. "Don't give me any of your chin. I'm lettin' you off because she squared you."

With quick long strides Hatfield got to his horse and, leaping astride, he reached both hands down for the bridle. Finding that, he straightened up bent a pale, vindictive face upon Cal, and goading the horse he plunged away under the trees.

When Cal turned to Georgiana his stern resolve almost melted. But weakness and tender-heartedness were not to be tolerated now.

"Reckon if you're to blame, I'll take it out on you," he began, striding up to her.

"Why—Cal!" she faltered. "You never were like this—before."

"I never knew all about you before," he returned bitterly.

"You can't talk to me that way," she said. "I'm sorry for what I've done, but I'm not ashamed. Be careful you don't insult me."

Cal decided the fewer words exchanged the better. He thrust his gun back into its sheath, and then fastened his left hand in the front of Georgiana's blouse.

"You come with me," he said.

"I'll do nothing of the—"

Cal began to stride back into the glade, pulling her with him. For a few yards she went unyieldingly, as if in amazement. Then she began to resist.

"Let go—I say," she panted. "Are you drunk or crazy?—Cal Thurman, I won't go with you. Why, you're worse than Hatfield."

At that he gave her a violent jerk and shake which upset her equilibrium, and she would have fallen, save for his arm. He dragged her on. At sight of his horse she suddenly grew limp.

"What do—you mean to do?" she whispered.

He made no reply. Untying the bridle with one hand was not easy, but he accomplished it. Then shifting his hold on her, he essayed to mount the horse. This was even more difficult. Finally he let go of her, mounted in a flash, and reaching down secured her again before she had made a step. The horse was trustworthy, yet spirited, and his nervous steps made Cal drag the girl off her feet.

Exerting all his strength, he swung her up so that he could reach her with his free hand. Then he lifted her up in front of him, across his saddle. He had tied a blanket over the pommel so that he could carry her there without injury. As the horse started off up the swale, Georgiana screamed. Cal clapped a rough hand over her mouth. At that she began to fight. She bit his hand like a wildcat and tore and clawed at him.

"Damn you—Cal Thurman!" she burst

out furiously. "Am I an Indian—to be packed-off like this?"

For a moment she made it extremely uncomfortable for him. Wrestling in his arms, beating at his face, she made it almost impossible to hold her and guide the horse under the branches. He was struck several times, once being nearly knocked off. Then a branch hit the struggling girl on the head, hard enough to take the fight out of her.

As her head fell back upon his shoulder Cal realized that she had fainted. He could only ease her posture and hold her. Over the next ridge there was water, and if she did not come to before he reached it, he would stop there to revive her. Fortunately, the trail had led out of the low-spreading trees, up a brush slope. Her loosened hair fell over his arm and locks of it yielded to the breeze.

"It's done!" he breathed, as if to the loveliness of the hills. Yet his heart quaked at the whiteness and stillness of her face. A scratch on her brow showed tiny drops of blood. Cal kissed them away, and suddenly he bent to her lips. Coward and thief he felt himself, yet he had to kiss them. Not the first time, but so differently! She was his now.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"I Want My Supper!"

IT WAS a brush-overgrown trail, and try as he might he could not save Georgiana from being torn and dragged. He did manage, however, to protect her face.

She lay quiet so long that he began

to be concerned. A bruise had appeared on her brow, slowly swelling, and blood welled from it.

When he had ridden down the slope of the hill, into a wide well-wooded valley, with a rocky stream bed winding through it, he turned off his course to find water. Finally, he came to some sycamores, still holding golden-brown leaves, and here he found a clear rock-bound pool of water.

He had to slide out of the saddle while holding Georgiana on the horse. Then he lifted her off, and laid her in the shade of the trees. She appeared to be stirring, but her eyes were still closed. Running down to the water, he saturated his scarf, and hurried back to bathe her pale face. Presently she regained consciousness. Her eyes opened wide.

"You knocked me—senseless!" she whispered.

Quickly Cal read her tone and look. She believed he had struck her while she was fighting him. It was almost impossible to keep from blurting out that she had been stunned by a blow from a sweeping branch.

"Can you sit up?" he queried gruffly.

"I guess so," she replied, and with his help she rose to a sitting posture. She kept gazing at him so steadily that he found it difficult to hide confusion.

"Cal, tell me—would you have—have killed Bid Hatfield—if I hadn't taken the blame?" she asked, very low.

"Ahuh! Same as I would a hydrophobia skunk," replied Cal in the hard deep voice he had assumed.

"Oh, my heavens! what have I done?" she cried out.

"Reckon you've done a lot."

"This is no joke—no Tonto trick—to—to—"

"I should smile not," he declared, in dark, grim humor.

Then her gaze strayed away from him, and she seemed to look into the woods without seeing them.

"Get up now. I don't want to lose any more time," said Cal.

She stood up. "Where are you taking me?"

"Time enough to tell you—when we get there," he answered, and stepped to his horse. Mounting, he held out his hand to her. "Put your foot in the stirrup—an' I'll pull you up."

With his help she climbed up in front of him, and sat as on a sidesaddle. Cal held his bridle in his right hand, and with his left he encircled her slender waist. She pushed it away.

"I don't need your assistance," she said.

Whereupon Cal urged the horse into a trot, and Georgiana had difficulty in staying on. With left hand twisted in the mane of the horse, and her right clutching the pommel, she clung with all her might.

"Make him walk or I'll fall off," said Georgiana presently.

"All right. Fall off. I'll stop an' pick you up," replied Cal.

And sure enough the time soon came when she began to slide and slip. But she did not cry out for assistance. When, however, Cal put his left arm round her, and hauled her back, and held her there, she made no resistance or remark. She faced ahead, and apparently scorned speech with him.

Soon he turned up out of the ravine, and climbing a low hill, entered the pine woods. He was now not far from Boyd's ranch, and indeed he soon saw it down through the trees. He kept to the woods, and descending the hill he cautiously proceeded on to the road.

This led to the clearing where the cabin specified by Tuck was located.

"I see two riders," spoke up Georgiana.

"Ahuh!" replied Cal.

"For heaven's sake, can't you talk?" burst out the girl, at last. "You'll drive me mad. What are you going to do next? Those men! I'll call for help."

"Go ahead. It won't do you any good," replied Cal.

She was now erect, keen, strung with excitement, and unconsciously holding on to his arm. They rode through a grove of beautiful pines to the clearing. The cabin was now close at hand. Two horses were tethered to pine saplings. Their riders had manifestly entered the cabin, for a thin column of blue smoke was rising from the stove chimney.

Cal gathered all the courage he could muster. If he failed now and this outlandish scheme of his became gossip, he would forever be the laughingstock of the Tonto. Dismounting, he lifted the girl off, and then kept hold of her.

"Haven't you—hurt me enough?" she asked, wincing under his grasp.

"I'm takin' you into that cabin, an' you've got to do as I tell you," he said.

"Who's there?" she faltered.

"Friends of mine. Tuck Merry an'—Parson Meeker."

"Parson Meeker!" she whispered.

"Yes. An' you're goin' to marry me—do you get that?"

She was white, and one shaking little hand sought her breast. "Cal—you can't *make* me say—yes," she said.

"No. But it'll be worse for you an' me if you won't."

"I can tell Parson Meeker you dragged me up here—when I resisted you knocked me senseless. Then he wouldn't dare marry me to you."



"But you're not goin' to tell him," declared Cal fiercely.

"Why am—I not?"

"Because I've gone too far. I don't care what happens. I'd just as lief throw a gun on Parson Meeker. If you tell him, I'll carry you off anyhow."

"Where?" she gasped.

"I'll take you somewhere deep in the woods—until you do consent to marry me."

"Cal—have I driven you—mad?" she faltered.

"It's too late. Do I marry you or not?"

"Cal Thurman—I'll never go with you *alive* unless you do marry me," she retorted.

"Ahuh! So—it's—settled," panted Cal. "Come on. Let me do the talkin'."

He led her toward the cabin, and all the will he could summon did not halt his riot of emotions. She was walking beside him willingly!

It was dark and smoky inside. Cal closed the door. For a moment he could not see. Then Tuck towered over him.

"Here you are," he boomed out. "Right on time. Buddy, it's great! Georgie, I'm sure glad to see you. Looks like you must have rode some. Well, elopin' from big sister is some stunt, I'll say. Parson Meeker, this is the little lady, Georgiana Stockwell."

The parson, a tall gray man, bent low in the dim light to shake hands with Georgiana and peer into her face.

"I'm shore glad to meet you, Miss," he drawled.

"Thank you," replied Georgiana in low, nervous voice.

"Howdy, Parson," broke in Cal heartily, and wrung Meeker's hand. "It's sure good of you to rustle up here quick. You see—Georgie an' I have been up against a—a little trouble over this marryin'. We had to ride the brush to avoid meetin' anyone, an' I'm askin' you to hurry."

"Right-o," gaily replied Tuck. "Grab her hand there, Buddy, and we'll soon arrange this little matter."

It was then that the dark, smoky little room whirled round Cal, and all he seemed to be sure of was the shaking little hand in his. He heard the preacher and his own voice, and Georgiana's whisper, all strange and far away.

Then Tuck was pounding him on the back, wringing his hand, and talking at a great rate. Parson Meeker, too, shook his hand.

"Ho! Ho! I guess I get to kiss the bride," said Tuck Merry as he bent over the girl. "Georgie, I always had a hankering to kiss you just once—There! That's for good luck. You've married a real man! God bless you."

The preacher had kind words of congratulation and hope for both Cal and Georgiana.

"Cal, old scout, we'll be rustling along," Tuck said. "It's all over now and you're the luckiest boy in the Tonto. I'll go back to the ranch and break the news. Won't they be surprised? Tomorrow I'll have Mary pack all of Georgie's things and I'll bring them up to Rock Spring Mesa—the new homestead, Cal!"

Cal unaltered his horse, and began to shorten the stirrups. Georgiana stood

close by, watching him.

"Are you going to walk?" she asked.

"Yes. It's hard trail uphill, an' you'll have to ride," he said.

"Is what Tuck Merry said true—about you taking me to your homestead?"

"Wait an' see," he replied, trying to assume the former gruff voice.

Cal untied the blanket from in front of the saddle, and then motioned for her to mount. She had difficulty in getting up, but he could not trust himself to help her then. He folded the blanket lengthwise and threw it over the saddle in front of her, so that it would afford some protection from the brush. Then he took up the bridle, and started off at a brisk walk, leading the horse.

What a relief to get his back turned to those steady, searching eyes! His action began to loom enormously. Still he did not regret it. He had married her. That simple fact would go abroad all over the Tonto, and while he would be ridiculed, he was bound to be respected. But how would Mary Stockwell take his action? She, of all people, would understand and be lenient. It was not beyond the bounds of possibility that she would even be glad.

Cal kept to the dim back trails, and he walked fast. It was two hours' horseback ride from Boyd's ranch to Rock Spring Mesa, over the regular trail. This one was longer, rough and brushy, and steep. Cal did not feel any fatigue or cold, or anything but a terrible disfavor with himself.

At last Cal led his horse up on the level, in under the great, gnarled, gray-colored checker-barked junipers, and through the brown-matted aisles, to the new clearing.

There, across the open field, where the blackened stumps still smoked, stood the new cabin. Sight of it gave

Cal a sudden pang, as if a blade had pierced his side. A few more steps, a few more false words, and then the farce would be ended.

At that very moment Tuck Merry's words returned to Cal. *Make it a grand finale!* Why not? What would she do or say? He would do that just for the deviltry of it. Then, unless the world came to an end, he would tell her the truth.

Cal dropped the bridle in front of the porch. Turning to Georgiana, he found her sitting up, peering curiously at the cabin. She did not look much the worse for this second long ride. Pulling the blanket from round her, he threw it upon the porch.

"Get down an' come in!" he said.

Georgiana neither moved nor spoke. Her head appeared tilted back a little.

"Come on—my bride!" he called hoarsely, and laid a heavy hand on her.

Suddenly she slapped him violently across the face. It was such a shock that he almost staggered.

Then a kind of bursting passion made a savage of him. One powerful pull brought her out of the saddle, sliding into his arms. He held her there, hard and tight, so that her feeble resistance was futile. He kissed her, almost as violently as she had struck him. She became limp in his arms.

Mounting the porch, he carried her to the door of the kitchen and opened it. Going into the dark room, he felt around until he found a corner with a built-in couch, and there he deposited her.

He lighted the lamp. It was a large new one and gave forth a bright light. Without a glance at the girl he proceeded to start a fire in the stove. The splinters of dry hard juniper began to blaze and sputter. He added larger split pieces,

and soon there was a cheerful blaze. Then he closed the stove. In his right hand he still held a billet of wood.

Wheeling suddenly, Cal looked for the girl. She was sitting up. Her gaze was fixed strangely on him.

"Now, Mrs. Cal Thurman!" he thundered, and then beat the stove with the billet of wood. It clanged loud. Georgiana gave a fearful start. "*I want my supper! I'm not goin' to beg for it an' I'm not goin' to serenade you to get it—but I want it!*"

Then Cal had the surprise of his life. She rose to her feet. She came right up to him. "Yes—I—I will get your—supper," she said tremulously.

"Ah—!" Cal's favorite exclamation broke off in the middle. Yet it served as an acceptance.

"Have you—things here?" she asked.

"Everythin' ready for you," he replied thickly. "I—I'll go put my horse away an' do some chores."

He stamped out, closing the door behind him. The cold night wind fanned his heated face.

"Whew!" he whispered as he leaned against a porch post. "Scared her into the middle of next week! Damn that Tuck Merry! I'll lick him for this. Poor kid!"

He unsaddled his horse, and hobbling him turned him loose in the clearing. Then he carried the saddle and put it on a pack under the porch. Next he carried some pieces of wood, and thumped them down near the door of the cabin room that stood across the porch space from the kitchen. Opening the door, he went in. This was the living-room. Cal lit a lamp, and then proceeded to kindle a fire in the open fireplace. This leisurely done, he surveyed the room. It was cheerful. He and Tuck had made elaborate efforts to utilize all Cal had

bought. A red blanket on the bed lent a touch of color. What would Georgiana think of the bedposts that reached to the ceiling?

"Scared half to death!" he muttered, as he paused. "What must she be thinkin' now? My God!"

He strode out, leaving the door wide, and the broad flare of light followed him across the intervening space of porch to the kitchen door. Vigorously he opened that. Georgiana was setting the table, and his entering so suddenly startled her.

"Reckon I'd like some hot water, Georgie," he said.

She poured it out of a steaming teakettle. Cal was aware of her scrutiny, but he paid no heed, and went to splashing in the basin. He washed his face thoroughly, as if to remove with the brush-dirt all of the villainous expression he had counterfeited.

"How about supper?" he asked.

"It's ready," she said, "the best I could do. My fingers are all thumbs tonight."

"No wonder," he replied as he pulled up the little bench to sit upon. And he surveyed the table. "If it's as good as it looks—" He did not speak again except to ask her if she could not eat.

"I'm afraid I cannot," she replied.

Soon he had finished and then he rose. "Jollyin' aside, Georgie, it was a good supper. Reckon there's no danger of my forgettin' it. I'll wash dishes."

"Cal, you're different—like your old self!" she exclaimed suddenly.

"Me! Aw, it's just because I cleaned up," he replied with a smile.

"I don't get you," she said dubiously.

"Well, Georgie, you never did get me, an', worse luck for me, you never will. Come now, I want you to see the other cabin."

"Other cabin?" she echoed.

"Sure. This is only the kitchen. Come on."

He led her out of the kitchen. The shaking of her hand, its clammy touch, told him much. He had to urge her, drag her a little to get her into the other cabin.

"Isn't this nice?" he asked, without looking at her, and he released her hand.

Georgiana did not reply.

"Reckon you're all in," he said hurriedly. "Here—see the bar that locks the door. Uncle Gard said a grizzly bear couldn't get in here with the door barred."

Then he drew his gun from his belt and laid it on the table.

"Reckon you won't need that, but there it is," he said, and moved back to the door.

"Good night," he said, and wheeling he went out and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Strange Role for Georgie

AS THE door slammed behind Cal, not violently, but decisively, Georgiana's nerve-wracked body gave a little leap. For a moment she stood there, trembling, passing from uncertain dread to certain relief, gazing at the door where Cal had disappeared. Then, answering to instinct, she ran to lift the heavy bar and place it in position. That seemed to make a vast, strange difference.

When her roving eyes fell upon the big blue gun Cal had left upon the table, a thrill ran through her. That was the gun he had leveled at Bid Hatfield,

and with which he might have killed him. Georgiana shuddered. She closed her eyes. But that did not blot out a picture of Cal Thurman, wild-eyed, villainous of mien, suddenly revealed in his true character.

What'd he leave that gun there for? pondered Georgiana, and she opened her eyes to stare at it. It had a dark, sinister significance. For only one purpose—to protect herself, to kill him, if she wanted to. But why should he think she wanted to kill him? Was it not scorn of her—that she could imagine she needed protection from him? Was it not a suggestion of how bitter his life had become and that he did not care how soon it ended? Had he not struck her brutally, cruelly?

"He wasn't drunk—he wasn't crazy," she soliloquized. "It was just the devil in him. He's a descendant of these Tonto backwoodsmen."

That seemed to fix itself in Georgiana's mind. She hated him. She would go away from this place tomorrow as soon as she dared. Someone would come to whom she could tell her story. But what if she raised that devil in him again? The thought made her absolutely weak. How cold-bloodedly savage he had been! In such a mood Cal Thurman was capable of anything. Yet, why had he suddenly become transformed, why had he told her to bar the door of this room and given her his gun, and then stalked out?

The fire burned down into a beautiful bed of red and white embers. Outside the wind had risen. The room was growing cold. She went to the window and closed it all but a couple of inches. The mountain air blew in, like ice, with some strange tang. She saw the dark Rim standing up against the white

stars, and the sight impressed her powerfully.

"It's wild and woolly, all right," said Georgiana, "and there's an Indian in the next cabin, I'll tell the world! What am I going to do?"

After a moment's deliberation she extinguished the lamp, and without removing even her shoes she lay down on the bed and pulled a couple of blankets up over her. The room now seemed wonderfully changed. The red embers threw ruddy shadows on the floor and sent long streaks to her eyes. Suddenly she became aware of a low moaning sound. It startled her. She listened. Only the wind under the eaves of the cabin! Lower she crept down under the blankets. She had begun to feel warm and comfortable and a languor was stealing over her.

Every thought, every motion, seemed to bring Cal Thurman back before her consciousness. She resented that. He had become a monster in her sight. How abominably he had turned out! She found herself correcting a sort of self-pity because he had so bitterly disappointed her. But this thought seemed hardly fair, for she confessed she was not exactly an angel. She wanted to put Cal Thurman out of her mind, as much out of her mind as he would be out of her life after tomorrow.

"Yes—very well—but you are his wife!"

Georgiana spoke these words aloud to her own ears. They brought her upright in bed, transfixed and thrilling.

"His wife!" she whispered. "My God! I married him! I said yes, *yes*, just as if I meant it. That parson never guessed I was forced. He'd never believe me if I swore it on my bended knees. I'm Cal Thurman's wife—right this minute—of my own free will!"

Somehow it seemed a terrible realization.

"It'll have to be annulled," said Georgiana. "I can put him in jail. Won't his life be one long round of bliss after I tell what he did to me? He won't be so darn popular then."

As the night wore away Georgiana lay there refusing to go to sleep or listen to a still small voice that seemed to be knocking at the gate of her conscience. Yet she grew drowsy, and her reflections lost clarity as weariness gradually overcame her. At last she fell asleep.

Georgiana awakened with a start. Bright sunlight was streaming into the room. She became aware of a loud knocking on the door.

"Georgie, are you all right?" called Cal in a tone of anxiety.

Georgiana lay quiet.

"Georgie, are you dead?" he yelled, and pounded hard on the door.

"It's no fault of yours that I'm not dead," she replied. "What do you want?"

"Aw!" She heard him exclaim in relief. "If you'll let me in I'll start a fire for you. It's cold up here under the Rim."

"I don't need any fire," she answered.

"But you want breakfast?"

Georgiana pondered that a moment, then replied. "I'll get breakfast for you, but I don't want any."

"I have your breakfast ready," he went on.

Georgiana sat up in the bed and slowly pushed down the blankets. She was about to say that she did not feel hungry, when he spoke again.

"You get up an' hurry, before your breakfast's cold. I've work to do. I can't wait any longer."

"What time is it?"

"Reckon it's nearly noon. Georgie, I must rustle over to my uncle Gard's ranch. Won't be back till late." Here he paused and coughed. "I—you—see here, what I want to say is—you're free to do as you like."

Georgiana listened to this with mingled surprise and doubt.

"Do you hear me?" he queried sharply.

"Yes, I hear you, Cal Thurman, but I don't get you," she retorted. "You think I'm a liar, don't you?"

"Wal, since you tax me," he drawled, "reckon I do. An' I shore think you're a hell of a lot more!"

Blank silence followed. Georgiana wanted to laugh, and yet she knew she was angry. What a fool Cal was!

"Ahuh!" he ejaculated. She heard his deep breath. "Reckon that'll be about all."

His heavy footfalls crossed the porch and crunched the gravel beyond. Georgiana slipped to the window and peeped out. He was mounting his horse. Now—he was riding off. Most likely it was a ruse to deceive her. Presently he disappeared in the edge of the woods.

Whereupon she bethought herself of personal matters of the moment. She had slept fully dressed, and thought she looked as if she had. Her hair was in a condition she could not remember as ever equalling it. Her face showed tear streaks through the black stain of brush-dust she had accumulated. And a big black-and-blue bruise showed above her temple. Luckily she could hide it with her hair.

"Good night!" muttered Georgiana as she surveyed herself. "Fancy me ever coming to this!"

The water in the pitcher was so cold that Georgiana could not use it. Hurrying to the door, she opened it, and with a furtive glance to right and left she

ran across the porch and went into the kitchen. It was warm. An odor of ham pleasantly assailed her nostrils. Georgiana suddenly discovered she was ravenously hungry. The kitchen table was set for one. Its neatness and cleanliness surprised her. The biscuits were hot, the coffeepot was emitting fragrant vapors, the skillet with two crisp slices of ham sat back on the stove.

"What do you know about that?"

Then she washed her face in hot water, and, finding a comb and brush under a little mirror, she worked her rebellious hair into some semblance of its former well-groomed condition.

"I wonder if he will stay away long," she mused. "I can't leave here alone—on foot. I'd get lost. Somebody will come, surely."

Then it appeared impossible to be longer oblivious of the breakfast. Breakfast with Georgiana for weeks had been a farce. She never wanted anything. But this morning she was genuinely hungry and she ate just about all that Cal had prepared.

"I'll say this is some adventure," soliloquized Georgiana. "I always wanted *something* to happen. But hardly this!—If I didn't hate him so—if he hadn't turned out so low-down! That knock in the head! I ought to kill Cal Thurman for that."

There was then nothing to do but wait for somebody to come. She must occupy herself, or a nervous restlessness would soon possess her.

"I suppose it'd be decent to wash his old dishes," she muttered. "To give the devil his due, I've got to hand it to Cal Thurman as a housekeeper."

Georgiana washed the dishes and utensils, and had just finished making the kitchen tidy when sound of voices and the pound of hoofs made her heart

beat quickly. Had Cal returned? She peeped out of the kitchen window, to see a number of packed burros, the very first of which was Jinny, and she had a trunk on her back. Georgiana stared. She recognized that trunk. It belonged to her. Then into her amazed sight came her sister Mary, riding Enoch's bay pony, and after her Tuck Merry and another rider.

"Ho, homesteaders!" called out Mary's rich, happy voice.

Georgiana threw open the door. Mary was right there, on the porch. She wore a short, heavy riding-coat with furry collar turned up. There was frost on it. Her sweet face was rosy from cold and exercise. Her gray eyes were alight with love and happiness.

"Oh, Georgie—little sister!" cried Mary, with a half-sob of joy, and she enfolded her, and hugged and kissed her until Georgiana had scarcely any breath left to talk with.

More than that, Georgiana found herself with swelling heart and dimming eyes. Something was disarming her. Mary's joy at sight of her had struck to the depths. She clung to her sister, silently, passionately, and in that contact she bridged any estrangement which might have intervened.

"Georgie—dear, child—don't cry," Mary was saying, and squeezing her as she spoke. "I'm not angry. Do you understand? Your elopement made me the happiest woman in the world!"

"Made you—happy!" faltered Georgiana.

"Of course you don't understand," replied Mary, "but you will, dear, shortly. Let us go inside. I'm nearly frozen."

She drew Georgiana back from the threshold, and then called to the men outside: "Unpack and carry the things here on the porch."

Closing the door, she once more unfolded Georgiana. "You darling! You sly little minx! You atrocious little flirt! All the time it was Cal! Oh, Georgie, I'm so happy! I'm nearly out of my head!"

"You talk—sort of nutty," replied Georgiana tremulously.

"What a cosy fine kitchen!" exclaimed Mary, sweeping a woman's keen eye all around. "I must see everything. But let's talk first—Where's Cal?"

"Gone off to work," replied Georgiana, nerving herself to blurt out Cal's perfidy and her wretched situation.

"Georgie, your marriage saved my happiness," declared Mary in sweet gravity.

"Oh, what—do you mean?" replied Georgiana.

"Come, let us sit here," replied Mary, drawing Georgiana to the couch and still keeping her in a close embrace. "I can tell you now. Listen, and please do not be hurt now at anything I say. You never realized just what the true situation was here. I tried to make you see long ago how dangerous it was for you to—to trifle with these boys. You never saw how your accepting Cal's attentions and making him crazy about you was a most serious matter with all the Thurmans. When you began to flirt with other boys and poor Cal showed his misery—then they began to grow cold. After the October dance, and your cool indifference to Cal when you should have appreciated his loyalty, then even Enoch turned against you. He wanted me to send you home. Well, day before yesterday the climax came—Dear, I hate to tell you."

"Go on," said Georgiana.

"Enoch came home from town, perfectly furious about something he had

heard about you—remarks credited to Bid Hatfield, according to the gossip. Enoch said you would have to get out. I—I was shocked. Well, I told Enoch I was going to stand by you, come what might. Then we quarreled—whew!—I told Enoch pretty plainly where to get off, as you would say. Then he raved and swore it was all on account of that 'damned little huzzy of a sister.' I shut him up pronto and I told him I would give him a couple of days to reconsider, then if he did not I would break our engagement and take you with me—away from the Tonto."

"Oh—Mary!" cried Georgiana.

"It was hard, Georgie dear," went on her sister. "But I could not see any other way. I grew more wretched. Enoch kept away from me, and I know he never would have weakened. I didn't get home until late last night. Enoch met me. He didn't explain. He just hugged me—like—like a bear. Right before everybody. Then I saw that he seemed tremendously happy. So were all the Thurmans, especially old Henry."

"I asked what it all meant, especially Enoch's disgraceful conduct, and everybody shouted at me. 'Cal and Georgie are married!'" You could have knocked me over with a feather. But when I realized it was true I was the happiest one there. Tuck Merry had brought the news. I didn't get a chance to talk to Tuck then, but I had it out with Enoch. I just scared him good. Made him think I couldn't forgive his mulishness. He pleaded with me. It was very, very nice after the way he had talked and acted when we quarreled. Well, to make a long story short, we made up, and we are going to celebrate your marriage by getting married ourselves."

"When, Mary?" whispered Georgiana huskily.

"Enoch begged to make it a week from your wedding-day, but I held out for a month—and so, darling, you've made us all happy. You have saved Cal in the very nick of time, not to mention poor me and yourself!"

"Mary, tell me, did Cal know you quarreled with Enoch?" asked Georgiana, feeling the rising tide of an irresistible flood in her breast.

"Indeed he did! Enoch told him. I didn't know this till last night. Cal was fighting mad, Enoch said. He swore if Enoch drove you and me away he was through with the Thurmans. Oh, they had it hot and heavy. Honestly, I believe Enoch was as happy to have all right between him and Cal again as he was to get me back."

Suddenly Georgiana collapsed hard against her sister's breast, and clinging to her she sobbed out, incoherently "Oh—Mary—Ma—ry!—I've been—just what Enoch—called me—and oh, I—I want to die."

"Why, Georgie!" exclaimed Mary in distress, as she folded her sister in a close embrace and bent over her tenderly. "What are you saying? You poor child! You had to have your fling—and that's over now, thank goodness!—I'm glad you *can* cry. Just let go and cry all you want."

Georgiana did not soon wear out that spasm of weeping. The dammed-up flood burst, and for a good while she was in the physical throes of collapse. When at length she began to recover somewhat she seemed to be the victim of an enormous dread.

"Mary, you still—love me?" she asked brokenly.

"Georgiana, what a question! You haven't given me a chance to love you.

Oh, maybe all this trouble will be good in the end. It must bring us closer, dear."

Then Georgiana lay silent. All she could do was to hide her shame and misery, to accept her strange destiny for the present, and for the sake of others put aside her own selfish wants until a more favorable time.

"Sister, all I can say is I begin to see—and if I had the last few months to live over I'd do different."

Mary kissed her with earnest warmth. "Georgie, that is all I needed today to make my happiness perfect. Oh, I never lost my faith in you."

Georgiana veiled her eyes. Just now she must force herself to pretend to be what Mary believed her. So she braved it out. She submerged herself. She dried her tears, and wrought the miracle of a smile when her self-abasement and wretchedness were exceedingly poignant.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Decision Postponed

IT WAS five o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was tipping the far distant mountain range. Mary had been gone two hours.

"What can I do—oh what must I do? Georgiana whispered.

She paced the room, sweeping her eyes over the vast improvement Mary had wrought. What an ordeal she had endured in helping Mary drag her trunk and bags and boxes, all her possessions, into this living-room, in watching her and listening while she unpacked everything, and hung and

arranged and draped until the cabin interior was transformed!

Georgiana gazed around in her extremity, as if these belongings of hers could speak in wisdom that would enlighten her. But they spoke of pleasure, happy memories, the comforts of home, all of which seemed mockery here.

The fire she and Mary had kindled shone red and warm on the hearth-stone; and it likewise seemed a lie.

"I'm here. I haven't gone away. He'll return soon—and I'm his *wife*!" She cried out in her distraction.

It came to her then that she had to stay now. Her one hope of escape had failed. She might have courage enough to run off, anywhere away from this hateful homestead. But she was afraid of the forest at night. Besides, she was compelled to stay for Mary's sake, at least until Mary was safely married to that iron-jawed Enoch.

What distracted Georgiana then was the dire necessity of finding some way to save her pride.

"What can I say to him—when he finds me still here?" she asked. "I've got to dope out some plan."

Making believe had been Georgiana's pastime as a child, and as a girl it had become a dominant characteristic. All at once a flash of divination seemed to illumine the dark perplexity of her mind. Why not try honesty?

"I'll be on the level," she decided, "and I'll take my medicine."

Whereupon she resolutely went into the kitchen and put her mind upon the considerable task of getting supper. The short winter day had ended and twilight had mantled the mesa. She lighted the lamp. Then she bethought herself of her pretty aprons. Running back to the living-room, she found one and donned it, tarrying a moment to

catch a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Upon returning to the kitchen, she rekindled the fire in the stove, and then busied herself in preparations for the meal. Busy with hands, preoccupied in mind, she forgot what she dreaded until she heard a step on the porch.

"Who's there?" she called.

"It's Cal," came the reply in a weary voice.

He entered, haggard and dirty, and he limped as he walked. His clothes gave forth the odor of the dry pine woods.

"I met Mary down at the school-house. You didn't tell her," he said.

"No," she replied, simply.

"Why?"

"You know the trouble she and Enoch had on my account?"

"Ahuh! Enoch is an old porcupine. Did they make up?"

"Yes. And I—I just couldn't tell her."

"Reckon it would have been tough. An' that's why you're still here?"

"Mostly. But I—I've no great desire to be handled as I was yesterday."

Without more words he turned away to the bench, and filling the wash basin with water he stooped over it. Georgiana watched him out of the corner of her eye, while busting round table and stove. When at length he turned again to the light she glanced concernedly at his face. He seemed years older.

Presently the supper was ready, and they sat opposite each other, silent except for the fewest of words necessary at the table. Cal ate methodically.

When they had finished this strange meal Cal said he would do the rest of the work. Georgiana was glad enough to get out of it. She left Cal sitting at the table, his head bowed on his hand. Once safely barred in her room, Georgiana fell victim to remorse.

"Oh, I'm sorry—sorry for him, no matter what he's done to me," she exclaimed. "He knows how hopeless it is. He knows what I'll do—and then he'll be ruined."

Next day established in Georgiana's mind a true perspective of the state of affairs as they existed then, and would, not improbably, remain for some time to come.

She could not understand Cal Thurman. He talked very little, and seemed anxious to get out of her sight. A brooding, almost somber preoccupation attended him during the little while she saw him. She decided that he knew full well she would not stay there long, and likewise knew why she remained at all. There did not seem to be any justification for Georgiana's fear that he might have another fit of fury, like the one in which he had carried her off. The day brought relief in the assurance that he would let her severely alone.

Her own part in meeting the present was simple enough. As long as she remained under Cal Thurman's roof, and partook of the food he supplied, she must work to earn it. Even if she had not too much pride to accept anything from him, she must work for her own sake.

"They thought I was no good for anything but to mush over boys," she soliloquized, darkly. "Everybody except Mary thought bad of me. Cal thinks so now, I'll bet. All because I fooled a little with these moonstruck boncheads! Well, little Georgiana will proceed to fool them in another way."

So she made deliberate plans for the necessary household work and for the manifold improvement that was possible. Then she went to work. Night found her infinitely weary.

Next day, about noon, she had a caller, no other than her father-in-law, Henry Thurman.

"What you all doin' about heah?" he asked, beaming upon her.

"Cal's building a fence at his uncle's, and I'm up to my eyes in work," replied Georgiana.

"Wal, some folks about the Tonto hollered too soon," he said. "Daughter, I shore figger that Cal's lucky."

"Thank you," murmured Georgiana, warming under his approval.

"Georgie, what you want for a weddin'-present?" he asked with a broad grin. "Reckon that's why I'm heah. But I ain't said airy word about it."

"It's very good of yu. But I don't want anything," replied Georgiana.

"Wal, I reckon you do. Young folks jest startin' a homestead need a lot. Come here, daughter and put on yore thinkin-cap."

Suddenly Georgiana remembered her plan for work and improvement of the cabins.

"If I tell you what I'd like, will you keep it secret—for a while?" she asked.

"Mum's the word, Georgie."

"I'd like a sewing-machine and a lot of dry-goods."

"Wal, I'll be doggoned!" ejaculated Henry Thurman, greatly pleased.

"Daughter, I'm shore proud of you. Now you jest write out a list of what you want. I'll send it to Ryson. They can phone to Globe an' have it all come on the stage. I'll have it packed up heah pronto. I'll shore do my best to keep anybody from findin' out about it."

What with some work and sleep the days passed swiftly for Georgiana and though they all seemed similar, there was an intangible something growing with them. If there was any difference

in Cal it was the look of wonder and bewilderment he cast upon her in unguarded moments.

Georgiana had set herself a task almost beyond her strength. But she had set it and she stuck to it. She even chopped wood and carried water, chores that sometimes became necessary when Cal was away.

Her appetite increased to an amusing and alarming capacity. The keen cold winter air, clear and sharp, lost its terrors for her. On that sunny south slope the snow melted almost as it fell, and so one of the dreaded features of winter did not keep Georgiana indoors.

During this time Cal had made additions to his homestead. From his uncle Gard's ranch he had brought chickens, pigs, two cows and a calf, and also loads of sorghum and corn to feed them. Those new comers did not add to Georgiana's labors, because Cal did all the work of caring for them.

She and Cal found it impossible, though estranged as they were, to keep wholly aloof from each other. At night, when Cal came in from his last chores, they talked of the simple facts of the day and the needs and probabilities of the morrow. It seemed that Cal hid every sign of his love and Georgiana gradually forgot her dread. They were never together except at mealtimes.



One night Cal came in with a troubled face.

"Enoch sent word we were to come down to Green Valley tomorrow," he said. "He an' Mary are goin' to be married."

"Oh—has it been a month since—since—"

"Reckon it has," replied Cal dryly. "One month tomorrow! Seems like a million years to me. Do you want to go to your sister's wedding?"

"Yes, I want to go. Don't you?"

"I reckon not. But I can stand it if you can. All the Thurmans will be there an' lots of other folks. They'll have a chance at us."

"I—I forgot. It will be embarrassing—won't it?"

"Ahuh! I should think it'll be terrible. That's up to you. If I didn't come, Enoch would be sore. But I wouldn't care."

"Yes, you would. Enoch thinks a lot of you, Cal. But I'm scared stiff at the thought of facing all that crowd."

"They think we're happily married," said Cal with a hollow laugh.

That stung her. "Your tone implies an unhappy state you feel you don't deserve," she retorted.

"Ahuh!—Are we goin' or not?" he returned.

"Oh, we'll *have* to go," burst out Georgiana.

"All right. We'll have to ride horses and come back home tomorrow night in the dark. That won't be any fun."

"But why?" queried Georgiana.

"You don't seem as bright as you used to be. If we stay all night, Mother will give us one room—for both of us. Naturally, since we're supposed to be married. An' we can't stay, that's all."

"I—I didn't think," replied Georgiana hurriedly. "Of course—we must come back."

"That means you must dress to ride," he went on. "It will be cold, but by bundlin' up an' wearin' your boots I reckon you'll be warm enough."

"But, Cal, I can't stand up with Mary

—in a riding-suit—while she's married," protested Georgiana.

"What do you want to wear?" he queried.

She pondered a moment, and then replied hesitatingly, "My white dress—the one you hated. But I've lengthened it quite a good deal."

"Ahuh! I don't care what you wear any more, but I reckon a longer dress would please my folks."

Georgiana maintained silence, conscious of an accelerated pulse and a feeling of pique. So he did not care any more how she looked? For an instant the old Georgiana roused to conquest. She could make him love her as wildly as he used to—and more—and there was devil enough left in her to incite her to do it, if he dared to scorn her. But Cal's sad, worn face, his troubled eyes, disarmed her rash impulse.

"I'll pack your grip on my saddle," he went on. "Now do you want a hunch from me—somethin' for your own good?"

"Yes," she replied.

"I'm rememberin' the night you pretended to be hurt in the car—you know, when I brought you out to Green Valley. You fooled everybody. Well, make the same bluff tomorrow. Go to have a good time, an' pretend to be happy, even if you're miserable. You might fool even yourself. For all my folks an' friends will meet you more'n halfway."

"Thank you. I'll think it over," replied Georgiana, averting her eyes.

Next day Georgiana might have spared herself any worry about riding all the way down to Green Valley, alone with Cal. All the Gard Thurmans arrived at Cal's cabin, merrily en route to the wedding, and as Cal had timed their arrival he was ready to start.

The day was an unusually fine one

for winter, not cold, but keen and invigorating, dry under hoof, with white clouds sailing the blue sky, and a sun that comfortably warmed.

Georgiana had an auspicious start for this day in which she meant to pretend to be happy. Mrs. Gard Thurman struck the right chord in her greeting to Georgiana.

"Wal, lass, I'm glad to see you're pickin' up," she said kindly. "You look fine. An' shore them's real roses in your cheeks today!"

The men rode together, talking and smoking, sometimes half turned in their saddles, in the graceful manner of riders. Georgiana rode behind with the women.

In walk and trot this cavalcade went down the mountain trails, out of the pines into the cedar and juniper, and at last into the brush. It took nearly three hours to reach Green Valley. Georgiana enjoyed it, and only tired toward the very end. The dread of meeting people failed to materialize. Georgiana actually laughed when Tuck Merry strode out into the road, taller and thinner than ever, and showed his pleasure at sight of Ollie Thurman.

"Tuck, this air a bad day to go sweet on a lady," said Henry, chuckling.

It was he who lifted Georgiana off her horse and he did not neglect to make it an affectionate action. The porch appeared full of people, mostly long, shiny-faced, blue-jeaned riders that Georgiana did not see distinctly. But she saw Mary very clearly, and rushed into her arms.

"Georgie!" exclaimed Mary, after that first embrace, holding her at arm's-length and gazing upon her with glad eyes. "You look different. Your face is not so thin. I never saw you so—so pretty!"

Georgiana hugged her. "Old dear, it makes me happy to see you and hear you say that. Take it from me, you look pretty good yourself. This marriage stuff must be the dope for women."

Mary laughed happily. "Georgie, when will you ever drop your slang?"

"Sis, let me babble. Let me rave," implored Georgiana. "To you, anyhow. I haven't spoken thirty words since I saw you. But don't worry. I'm here to be the simple little bride of Cal Thurman. On exhibition! and believe me, I'll put it over this day."

Georgiana put on her white dress in the middle of the afternoon. This was in the seclusion of Mary's room. The effect was magical. Never before in her life had she looked so well.

"When they see you tonight they'll forget how you used to look," declared Mary.

"Cal hated this dress when it was so short," observed Georgiana. "I told him I had lengthened it, but I don't think he took much stock in what I said."

"Well, he certainly will tonight."

"I think I look pretty spiffy myself," replied Georgiana with complacent assurance. "But I've got to hide my hands. Look!"

"You've treated them cruelly, but they'll get well," said Mary. "And now, Georgie, help me a little with my dress."

The sisters spent the happiest hour they had ever known together. Georgiana did not have to play a part. Still she did not stop to think. Mary's happiness was infectious.

It took only a few moments for Parson Meeker to make Mary the wife of Enoch Thurman. In the Tonto, neither long courting nor ceremony was in favor.

But the congratulating of the bride and groom was a different matter. Georgiana thought the riders would tear Mary and her husband to pieces. This was their one opportunity and they made the most of it. That hilarious half hour prepared the day for dinner. This was really a feast. All the Thurman women had a share in it. Georgiana sat next to Mary, and on her left was Cal. Actually she had forgotten him until this hour.

After dinner came the personal contact with everybody present—the ordeal which Georgiana had so dreaded. Yet how mistaken she had been! All was simple, homely, sincere. They rang true. It was not a social gathering. It was the wedding of the chief of the clan. And Georgiana was made to feel something she had never dreamed of—that she counted in the sum of the Thurmans. She had given her hand to a Thurman—to the last of the Thurmans. Life was a strong, precious, splendid thing with these Tonto people. Youth was only a preparation. Marriage was a beginning. Before that hour ended Georgiana was a strangely thoughtful, repentant girl.

The big living-room was cleared of tables, and old Henry got out his fiddle.

"I'm a fiddlin' fool,

An' the last of my boys has gone to school."

They began one of the half-square, half-round, changing-partner dances in which all the young folk and many of the older took part. The old ranch house shook to its foundations. Never in her life had Georgiana been so whirled and lifted and raced and contended for. She began that dance fresh, excited, in the fun of the hour. She ended it spent, but on fire with life, vitality, intensity.

"Rest now an' cool off," Cal said to her. "We've got a long ride an' we must be goin' soon."

Georgiana was glad to leave the gay company and retire to her sister's room to change the white gown for riding-garb. Glad—but for a strange reason! Cal's words had broken a spell. It disturbed her suddenly to discover that an abrupt suggestion of departure from that happy circle had brought disappointment.

She and Cal slipped out the back way, just as if they were the bride and groom. A full moon shone white in the pale sky. The hills were black and lonely. An icy wind blew down from the heights.

"We'll ride some till we get to the grade," said Cal as he swung astride. "Stay close to me an' yell if anythin' goes wrong."

Then he was off at a fast trot. Georgiana's horse needed no urging. Soon Cal took to a lope. Georgiana found herself sailing along the white moon-blanced winding road, with the icy wind in her face. It was sweet, stinging, and so cold that she had to breathe through her nostrils. The dark forest sped by on each side. Now and then Cal looked back to see if all was well with her.

They trotted and loped their horses, and in what seemed a short time rode down into the Boyd Thurman clearing. Across the bare field, in the shadow of the pines, stood the little log cabin Georgiana remembered with a shock. She had been married there. Was it only a month ago?

Cal lost no time on the stretches of good road. Soon they entered the heavy pine forest, and the moonlight appeared mostly aloft. Georgiana had to ride her best along here. The horses were as eager as Cal to get home. As for

Georgiana, she would have liked more time to enjoy this midnight ride.

On they sped, and came to the best stretch of road, where the ground was free of stones. Cal's horse quickened his gait, and Georgiana's was not going to be left behind. Tufts of swinging pine needles reached out from the shadows. Georgiana had one blow which stung so smartly that she did not care for another. She had to see and dodge. The rhythmic beat of hoofs rang through the forest. At last Cal drew his horse to a walk at the foot of the trail up the hills.

Georgiana was in a glow. The cold night wind felt pleasant. The night was beautiful, the ride wonderful, the wild lonely Tonto forest strangely productive of thrills.

It came to her then that her month of martyrdom had ended with her sister's marriage. She could leave Cal Thurman's home now and go her way. No longer need she and her vexations and troublesome character, her problems and responsibilities, bring peril to Mary's future.

Georgiana felt that she must face her problem now. She had no excuse to stay longer with Cal. How easy to name those facts! But a host of considerations, like enemies ambushing her trail, rushed out to confront her. And the very first was a strange, stubborn, utterly incomprehensible vacillation. *Wait*, it whispered. *No hurry! Do not face it now.* The others trooped after this traitorous weakness. When would she go? Where? How? From what source could she get money to take her away? To whom could she appeal? Was it possible now to confess her trouble to anyone? What might happen to her? And lastly a sickening, humiliating why—*why go at all?*

She raised her drooping head to look. Cal rode there ahead, absorbed in his own trouble. She actually felt sorry for him. The horses were climbing sturdily. The white moon sailed aloft, cold, pure, passionless, watching as with an eye of destiny. The wind grew icier as the altitude increased. Then there swept the dark bold Rim, majestic and measureless, under the white radiance of moonlight.

At the cabin Cal hesitated just as he was about to help her dismount. He looked up at her.

"I'd like to ask—are you sorry you went?"

"No. I'm glad, Cal," she replied instantly.

"Why?" he added.

"Two reasons. Now that I know what it is I wouldn't have missed seeing Mary's happiness—not for any real or fancied fear in the world."

"Ahuh!" he said, as if he fully comprehended.

"The other reason is that I was wrong," she continued hurriedly. "Whatever it was I—I hated existed only in me—I forgot it. I had a wonderful time. And so I found everybody nice and kind."

"Aw, now that's fine," he exploded. "But I had a rotten time. My family, all the old women, the boys—even Tim Matthews, comin' to me, speakin' high of you—tellin' how sorry they were—apologizin' to me for what they'd said of you. Now all was well an' I deserved such a wonderful little wife—an'—an' they were so glad I was happy. My God!"

"I'm sorry you had to endure that for me."

"Reckon I'm glad I went," he returned quickly, "if this was the only time

I'd ever have to listen to them. But what kills me is thought of the next time—when—when—"

His voice broke huskily and trailed off. Georgina understood him to mean when she told the secret of their marriage and left him to the scorn and ridicule of his family.

"Cal, I'll stay if it means so much to you—and for Mary's sake," she whispered, impelled beyond resistance. "I'll stay a while longer for your sake and hers—if you'll not expect too much of me."

"Georgie, darlin'," he cried wildly, with a throb in his voice, "I beg you—to stay—on any conditions. I'll ask nothin' of you—nothin'. I swear."

"Very well," faltered Georgina, and slid off her horse. How cramped and dizzy she felt suddenly! She wanted to run, but could scarcely walk. "Good night."

"Reckon you'd better come in the kitchen an' get warm," Cal called after her.

But she stumbled across the porch and entered her room. She did not feel the cold. The darkness of the room was welcome. Throwing off gloves, hood, scarf, and coats, she bent with trembling hands to unlace her boots. Soon she was in bed, creeping deep under the blankets, throbbing and burning.

What was it that she had done? For Cal's sake and Mary's she had consented to remain there a while longer. Maybe, a little—but mostly for her own! She had grasped at the barest excuse. She had not considered. Impulse had governed her.

But in this tide of emotion there entered the quieting influence of a great relief. She did not have to run away just yet. She did not need to face that appalling future tomorrow or next day.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Tonto Honor

SPRING! Winter had gone with the fleeting February, and the snow line had vanished from the Rim, and the wild turkeys were gobbling from every ridge. The sun shone warm. Already the red soil of Rock Spring Mesa had begun to dry. One half the Mesa field had been cleared of stumps and rocks, and would soon be ready for spring plowing. The other half was now slowly clearing to Cal's strenuous labors.

Georgiana had stayed on a while longer. She had not been away from the homestead. Mary had visited her once, upon her return with Enoch from Phoenix. A pile of magazines and a shelf of books had been added to Georgiana's room. She worked much the same as on the first weeks of her stay there, only not quite so hard. She spent more time outdoors now.

Cal let her alone, except those daily hours when their joint labors and meal-times necessarily brought them together. Georgiana, in her loneliness, in her growing hunger for she knew not what, thought that she might have forgiven him if he had reverted a little to his former self. Yet never by word or action did he overstep what he deemed his place. Georgiana resented his humility. Had he not carried her off as ruthlessly as the Roman gladiator had the Sabine woman?

One March day a startling and disturbing bit of news came in the shape of a letter from Mary, brought by a rider. An aunt of the sisters had died, and in her will bequeathed each of them several thousand dollars. Just

how much Mary could not determine from their mother's letter, but they would soon receive the heritage. Strange how Georgiana reacted to this news of good fortune! She was not thrilled or overjoyed. She had a feeling of gladness for Mary. For herself there came only the thought that now she could go. She did not mention the fact of the inheritance to Cal.

Next morning before she awoke, Cal rode off down to Ryson. Georgiana had the whole day to herself, to think over the unlimited possibilities open to her.

Cal returned after dark, and the instant Georgiana saw his telltale face she knew something unusual had happened. He avoided meeting her eyes, and to her timid query he replied briefly, "Nothin' much."

Georgiana lost her dread, but curiosity and concern remained. On the following morning, after breakfast, Cal rode up to the porch and called her.

"Reckon I'd like to tell you somethin'," he said, as she appeared in the door.

"Yes?" she returned.

"Georgie, do you remember the day I made you marry me?"

"I'll say I do," she replied in surprise.

"You thought I struck you—knocked you senseless?"

"Yes. Didn't you?"

"No!" he declared ringingly. "I was rough. But I didn't strike you. My horse ran us under a tree. Your head hit a branch. That's all."

"Why have you let me think all this time that you did strike me?"

"Reckon at first it served my purpose to scare you," he admitted. "But after we were married it made me sore to think you could believe I'd hurt you."

"Ahuh!" replied Georgiana, imitating

him. "Well, why did you tell me now?"

"I'm ridin' over to the Bar XX," he replied coolly.

"Bar XX?" she stammered.

"Yes, an' if I don't happen to get back by sundown you saddle up an' ride over to Uncle Gard's."

"Will you be—there?" she asked, beginning to shake in alarm.

"No. I won't be there or here," he replied darkly. "But I reckon I'll be back early. I just wanted to tell you what to do in case—"

"Cal!" she cried piercingly.

"So long, Georgiana May," he called. His last glance seemed full of fiery reproach. Then he spurred his horse, and like a brown flash was off across the clearing.

"Cal!" she screamed after him. But he did not heed. And quickly he was out of sight in the timber.

"Bar XXI!" exclaimed Georgiana, in distress. "That is Saunders's ranch. Bloom is foreman of the Bar XX. Bid Hatfield is there."

The first hours of that day severely punished Georgiana. She fell prey to morbid dread and fear. But gradually her reasoning began to overcome her intuitive sense that catastrophe threatened. Even if Cal had ridden over to the Bar XX to confront Bid Hatfield, it could hardly mean more than a fight.

"I'd hate to have Bid Hatfield beat Cal," soliloquized Georgiana resentfully. "He's older than Cal, and much bigger."

About an hour before sunset, when Georgiana was in the kitchen beginning to prepare for the evening meal, she heard the pound of hoofs outside.

Georgiana flew to open the door. She saw a tall rider—Wess Thurman—and two horses, and over the hindmost horse

hung the long limp shape of a man, head down from the saddle.

"Who's that?" cried Georgiana.

"Wal, I reckon it's all thet's left of Cal," replied Wess.

"Oh, Heavens! I knew something dreadful was going to happen!" burst out Georgiana, and ran to where Wess was trying to slide Cal off the saddle. "Oh, Wess—say he's not hurt! *Blood!* All over him! Oh, how awful!"

"Hurt?" snorted Wess. "Hell, yes, but he ain't daid. Get out of my way."

Wess got both arms around Cal's middle and pulled him over the saddle. Then changing his hold he lifted Cal clear off the ground and carried him into the kitchen. Georgiana followed, wringing her hands. Wess laid the limp form of the boy on the couch.

"Some water, Georgie, an' I'll fetch him round," said Wess. "He's only fainted again."

Georgina flew to get water and towels.

"My Gawd! What a mug for a Thurman to have!" ejaculated Wess. "Heah, now, you Georgie—don't you look at him."

"I will!" flashed Georgiana, as she ran back to Wess with the basin. And she did look at Cal. She saw an unrecognizable face, beaten and swollen out of shape, purple in spots, raw like beef in others. Nose and mouth were bleeding, hair matted with blood.

Georgiana took this all in, and suddenly, horrified and frantic, she fell on her knees beside the couch.

"Oh, Cal is terribly injured," she wailed.

"Dammit! didn't I tell yuh not to look at him?" growled Wess as he splashed water in Cal's face.

"Oh, he's badly hurt," moaned Georgiana.

"Wal, he'll live to—to—" Here Wess broke off his speech.

"Tell me, for pity's sake, what happened?" implored Georgiana.

"Cal was jest bulldoggin' a mean steer," replied Wess as he began to bathe Cal's face.

"Don't lie to me, Wess Thurman," cried Georgiana.

Cal began to show signs of returning to consciousness. His breast heaved. He stirred. He moved his hands.

"Wal, yore comin' to, Cal," drawled Wess.

"You fetched—me home?" whispered Cal weakly.

"I shore did, an' it was a hell of a job."

"Georgie?" asked Cal, huskily.

"She's heah, an' actin' fust rate, considerin'," replied Wess, and he grinned and winked at Georgiana.

"Cal—I'm right by—you," faltered Georgiana. "Can't you see me?"

"Yes, now I can. But not very clear," he said. One of his eyes was swollen completely shut, and the other nearly so.

Wess handed the bloody towel to Georgiana and said, "Reckon thet's aboot as clean as I can git him. Now, Georgie, I'll lift him, an' you pull off thet dirty shirt. Tear it off—it's all rags, anyhow . . . There!" That done, Wess proceeded to remove Cal's boots, and then his jeans. "Wal, you can sleep in yore underclothes, you ole son-of-a-gun. Now I'll cover you over with this heah blanket—an' shore thet's aboot all I can think of."

"Georgie," said Cal, "I couldn't whip him."

"No?" murmured Georgiana.

"He was too big an' strong for me."

"I wish to Gawd you had licked him!" returned Wess fiercely.

Cal turned his disfigured face to the wall and lay quiet. Wess insisted on spending the night there. He helped Georgiana with the supper, and afterward, but it was not until he was carrying wood for the living-room fire that she had a moment alone with him.

"Now tell me what's happened," she demanded tensely.

"Reckon you ought to go to bed," he drawled.

"It was Bid Hatfield!" Georgiana declared.

"I should smile it was," returned Wess.

"Tell me," she burst out impatiently.

"Wal," replied Wess, "I was ridin' the Cold pasture when Tom Hall, one of the Bar XX outfit, come down the Mescal Ridge trail packin' Cal over the saddle of another hoss. He said Cal busted in on Bid over at the ranch an' they had a hell of a fight. They 'bout wrecked the bunkhouse. Cal more'n held his own until Bid tripped him an' took to rough-and-tumble. Then he damn near beat Cal to death. Saunders rode in just then an' stopped Bid. Cal was knocked clean out—couldn't get up. Someone had to pack him home, so Tom was doin' thet when he run into me."

"Wal," he went on, "I thanked Tom for bein' so decent, an' I took charge of Cal. When we got as far as Tonto Creek, I lifted him off his hoss an' brung him to. But he lost his senses again so I put him back on the saddle an' rustled for home."

"I think it splendid of you to—to be so good and fetch him here where no one can see him. Wess, is he badly hurt?"

"Pretty bad used up, I reckon," replied Wess, wagging his head. "Of course he ain't in any danger."

"Will he need a doctor?"

"Wal, we can decide thet tomorrow. I can't see any reason fer it now. Mother will come over heah, if she's needed, an' she's as good as any doctor."

"Wess, now tell me why Cal went after Bid Hatfield?" asked Georgiana.

"Aw, he jest wanted to fight, I reckon," rejoined Wess.

"Don't try to fool me, and don't lie," said Georgiana. She took his big rough hands, and looked up at him with an appeal that did not need to be simulated.

"Wess, you *must* tell me," she begged. "I'm one of your family now. I'm a Thurman. I've disgraced Cal and made trouble for you all. I *must* rectify it. I will! But I need to know the truth."

"Georgie, we Thurmans hev always been able to take care of our women an' their names," he replied. "Cal bit off too much in tacklin' Bid Hatfield with his bare fists. But I reckon thar's other ways to—"

"That's what I fear," interrupted Georgiana. "Cal must not meet Hatfield again."

"But, Georgie, you don't know us. Cal has to go after Bid now more'n ever. He will hev to drive Hatfield oot of the Tonto or—kill him."

"Oh, my God!—Wess, what are you saying?" cried Georgiana.

"I shore hate to tell you, Georgie, but it's true."

"Why?—Why?" whispered Georgiana.

"Because Cal has finally heard what we all knew. He was the last one to heah."

"What?"

"Bid Hatfield's talk aboot you."

"Wess, is—is it bad?" she asked.

"Reckon it couldn't be no wuss," replied Wess, much troubled. "Now,

heah, Georgie—don't you look mad like thet. You made me tell you. An' for Gawd's sake don't believe any' of us Thurmans take stock in what Hatfield says. You was new to the Tonto, an' a high-stepper at thet, as the boys say. You liked Bid an' made no bones aboot it. Same way you liked Tim Matthews, an' Arizona, an' of course Cal. You didn't know which one you wanted an' you wasn't in any hurry. Wal, you married Cal, an' thet settled thet. It shore squared everythin'. An' if Bid Hatfield hadn't been a low-down skunk you'd never heerd again of yore foolin'."

"Fooling!" echoed Georgiana poignantly. "Wess, I thank you for your faith in me. It is justified. Yet—"

Suddenly the door swung wide and Cal staggered in. He had put on his jeans and thrown a coat round his shoulders.

"Wess, what're you an' Georgie talkin' about—all this time?" he demanded hoarsely. "I heard you."

"Cal, I had to know," she said hurriedly.

"What?"

"Why you fought Hatfield."

"Wess could have left that for me to tell," declared Cal hotly.

"Cal. Don't be angry with Wess," she implored. "I had to know the truth."

"Ahu! What'd Wess tell you?" queried Cal.

"All he knew. How everybody had heard Hatfield's defamation of my character before you heard it."

"Aw!" breathed Cal. He writhed under the shame.

Georgiana seemed drawn to go up to Cal. Her instinct was to take hold of him, in pity, distress, impulse, somehow to express herself, but though she went close, it was not to touch him.

"Hatfield's a liar!" she said, in scorn.

"Georgie, that's the whole trouble," responded Cal. "He's lied about you from the first. He bragged about spoon-in' with you. I knew then what a liar—"

"But, Cal—that wasn't a lie," interrupted Georgiana impetuously. "I did spoon with him—we held hands and kissed. It happened three times. But that was all I did, absolutely. And it meant so little to me I forgot it until now."

Georgiana could not tell from Cal's battered face what he felt at her disclosure, but the slow droop of his head seemed proof of utter humiliation.

"Cal, don't you be a fool!" she cried in sudden piercing voice. This time her hands went to his bowed shoulders, and she shook him gently. "I understand a little better. But *you* don't understand. I've let lots of boys kiss me. And you here in the Tonto—you first, then Hatfield, and Tim Matthews—and Arizona, yes, even ugly Arizona and last, Hatfield again. But I meant nothing. What's a kiss? I let you all kiss me. I'm sorry. But I'm not ashamed. I may have been a silly vain little flirt—I must have been wrong, but I wasn't *bad*. You must see, Cal—you must not lose your respect for me."

Cal lifted his bleeding, bruised face, and it touched one of Georgiana's hands, burning her with its heat.

"Georgie, that hurts like hell, but I'm glad you had the nerve to tell me," he said huskily.

"You—you believe me?" she asked tremulously.

"Yes. An' I reckon I understand you better. It's a pity you didn't tell me—before—"

"Before what?" she interrupted as his husky voice faltered. "You mean before our marriage? Would that have kept you from marryin' me?"

"Nothin' could have kept me from marryin' you—not even if all Bid Hatfield's claims were true."

"Cal!" she cried, shrinking.

"I regret nothin'. As I said, what a pity you didn't tell me before it was too late."

This time she did not ask him what he meant. She knew. And suddenly she was mute.

"Cal," spoke up Wess, as he turned from the window, where he had discreetly retired, "thet'll be aboot all from both of you. I was heah an' I got ears. Now I'm a-goin' to put you back to bed."

Whereupon he led the sagging Cal toward the door. Opening it, he half turned his face to the girl. "Good night, Georgie. I'll look after Cal. An' you're welcome to know that I think a heap more of you than ever."

Georgiana was left alone, a victim to the most acute distress of mind and complexity of emotion that she had ever known. For long she sat on the deerskin rug before the fire, peering into the red glow, but seeing nothing.

At length out of the stress of that time she voiced one coherent thought: "I've got to keep Cal from killing Bid Hatfield, at any cost."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Georgie Ties It Up

OUT of the pain of the succeeding days; out of the watching by Cal in the dead of night, listening to his muttered dreams; out of the hours when he lay with discolored face to the wall, and the weak moments when he wept in his misery; out

of nursing him and tending his injuries, and reading to him, talking to make him forget; and lastly out of long association alone with him during this ordeal—Georgiana underwent the developing and transforming experience of real love.

It brought her deeper pangs, yet a vision of future happiness. It made her a woman. It relieved her burden. It decided the future.

But when in a week Cal had mended to the extent of walking out-of-doors, when the hideous swellings had left his face so he was not ashamed to be seen by his relatives, and later when he began to brood darkly and to avoid her, Georgiana realized that she must act soon to forestall any second meeting of his with Hatfield.

Her plan had long been made, and now only waited execution. She wrote a note to Tuck Merry, asking him to meet her the following morning at the fork of the Tonto and Mescal Ridge trails, and enclosing this note in a letter to her sister, she rode over to Gard Thurman's and intrusted it to one of the riders going down to Green Valley that night.

The last days of March had brought some of the lamblike weather that old folk contended was sure to follow the blustery beginning of that month. Georgiana rode back to the homestead strangely relieved in mind, able once more to revel in horseback-riding and to look at the sweeping green hills and the looming Rim, and to feel the beauty and wildness of it all, thankful that the sunny days had come again and that she was not compelled to leave the Tonto.

Next morning Cal began to show some little interest once more in his homestead. Wess had come over sev-

eral days to feed the stock, and had sent his younger brother at other times when he could not come. This day Cal assumed the tasks again.

Georgiana donned her riding-suit and boots, and even in her concentration on her purpose she did not overlook the value of making herself look as attractive as possible. Then she went out to the barn, and saddling her horse, which she had been careful to keep in that night, she rode off without seeing Cal or knowing whether he saw her or not. It did not matter. She could not be stopped now.

The morning was beautiful. Turkey gobblers made the welkin ring. Squirrels and jays took noisy note of her passing down the trail. She saw a bear track in the dust. The piny odor of the woods, so strong and dry and exhilarating, never had smelled so sweet. A forest fire somewhere added the fragrance of burning wood to the fresh air. The green pine thickets had taken on a new coat. All the forest seemed renewed. At Tonto Creek she saw two deer and a flock of turkeys that, little frightened, walked away into the woods. How amber-hued the pools and how white the rushing rapids!

Absorbed in the pleasant sensations of the ride and the growing excitement of her purpose, Georgiana found that



she had reached the meeting-place with Tuck before she had any idea she was near it. This was a mile below the school-house, which she had avoided passing. The trail forked here, marking a clearing and a ranger station.

Tuck Merry was waiting for her, and his homely features expressed considerable perturbation and very much pleasure. It seemed to Georgiana that she had never before really looked at him. What a huge, ungainly, long, and ludicrous individual he was! His cadaverous face, like a lean ham, appeared adorned with many queer things, most prominent of which was his enormous nose. But his smile, the light of his big eyes, belied the counterfeits of physical nature. Tuck Merry loomed up to Georgiana then as the chivalrous and faithful friend she needed.

"Georgie, this is some surprise," he said, in greeting.

"Howdy, Tuck! Aren't you flattered to be asked to meet a girl in trouble?" queried Georgiana, as she offered her hand.

"Flattered and proud," replied Tuck, with something of sharpness. "But don't waste time kidding me into taking your part. I'm for you. Come out with it. I know it's trouble between you and Cal. And I'm sick."

"Have you folks at Green Valley heard about Cal's fight with Hatfield?"

"Only yesterday," replied Tuck anxiously, "news came from Ryson, and we took it for Bar XX brand. But, anyway, I intended to ride up to see Cal today."

Thereupon Georgiana, in strong and feeling language, told in detail of the terrible beating Hatfield had administered to Cal. To her amazement his first expression was delight.

"We heard some of that," he blurted

out. "Tom Hall's talk. Cal was getting the best of Hatfield in a stand-up fight. Then the burly buzzer rough-housed him."

But Tuck's pleasure was short-lived, as was evident from the swift hardening and darkening of his face.

"What do you want of me?" he demanded.

"I want you to take me to the Bar XX ranch."

"For heaven's sake, Georgie, what for?"

"I am going to call that Bid Hatfield to his face," replied Georgiana, and then, in swifter, more fluent words, that grew poignant as she progressed, she told Tuck how Hatfield had besmirched her character, what a miserable liar he was, why Cal would soon hunt him up to kill him, and lastly that she must see Hatfield first and shame him before his own crowd, and make him retract his vile slander.

"Right-o! I get you, Georgie," retorted Tuck with quick, intent, comprehending look, not devoid of admiration. "I'm for you. We'll brand Mr. Hatfield a lemon. Now, Georgie, ride across the brook to the trail and go down. I'll catch up with you before you're gone half a mile. I want to phone from the ranger cabin and tell Henry I'm going to saw wood today but not at the saw-mill."

Georgiana did as she was bidden, thrilling gratefully for Tuck's instant championship. She found the narrow winding trail and soon passed the clearing, to enter a defile where Tonto Creek left the pine slopes for the brushy hills. True to his word, Tuck caught up with her, and with cheery call to make better time he took the lead.

The trail led above the babbling brook and kept to its course down the

ravine that soon grew to a rugged canyon. Eventually this opened into the Bear Flat clearing, a wild, lonely, deserted little ranch, and from there up and up the steep slopes, over the cedarred hills, and up again to the high barren ridge that got its name from the gray spiked patches of mescal cactus. Here on the heights could be seen the many ridges of the Tonto, sloping and sweeping, dark and rugged, down to the void that was the main canyon. Georgiana saw far across to the other side, where the slopes were the same, only running toward her, and she thought she recognized the one she rode down that fateful day with Cal.

Tuck led across this league-long Mescal Ridge, down into a wide canyon that opened out into level country, large enough for a ranch. The home of the Bar XX was as picturesque as Green Valley. The trail led into a road, and that rounded the margin of large fields, with dead stalks of corn and sorghum, and up into a beautiful cove between two brushy-sloped hills. Here stood the corrals of felled logs and low, squat, log cabins.

Blue smoke curled from the yellow stove chimney of the larger cabin. One of the corrals was full of dusty, kicking horses. Saddles littered the ground outside. The Bar XX riders were in for their noon meal.

"Somebody in the door, Georgie," said Tuck. "We're here. It's up to you. Don't lose your nerve."

Georgiana gave a defiant little laugh that was eloquent of her equilibrium. If Cal could stand to be beaten into insensibility on behalf of her reputation, what could she not do to save him from the madness of killing?

Several faces appeared back in the darkness of the cabin door. Then as

Tuck and Georgiana rode within speaking distance a tall man strode out, bare-headed. He had sandy hair, rather thin, and a long drooping mustache, a lean, brown, weather-beaten face, open and strong, and piercing light-blue eyes.

"It's Saunders, the boss," whispered Tuck to Georgiana.

"Howdy! Reckon I've seen you somewhere," he said to Tuck, and then when he espied that Tuck's companion was a girl he bowed. "Mawnin', Miss. Is there anythin' we can do for you?"

"Are you Mr. Saunders?" Georgiana asked.

"I am, at your service," he replied with a pleasant smile, and his keen eyes studied Georgiana's face.

"I'm Cal Thurman's wife," said Georgiana, with a sudden heave of her heart and a rush of hot blood clear to her temples. "I've ridden over here to face one of your riders—Bid Hatfield. Will you let me see him?"

"Certainly," replied Saunders.

"Then, before you call him out I want to tell you what brought me," continued Georgiana swiftly, feeling the interest and sure of the sympathy of this rancher. "Mary Stockwell, the schoolteacher at Green Valley, is my sister. She brought me out here for my health. I was a crazy kid. I—I liked the boys and I flirted with them. Bid Hatfield was one of them. I liked him. I let him kiss me—on several occasions. Then he insulted me. I never told a soul. But the next time I saw him I told him I wouldn't meet him any more. After that I married Cal Thurman. Just lately I learned that Hatfield has been talking about me—making me out a little hussy. Cal heard it at last, and that led to the fight. Now I'm over here to face Hatfield."

"Wal, wal!" ejaculated the rancher,

embarrassed and shocked. "That's a serious charge to lay on a man."

"Please let me see him," returned Georgiana.

"Wal, I reckon I will—an' I'll see him, too," said Saunders forcefully. Turning away, he took several long strides toward the door of the cabin. "Hey, Bid Hatfield, you're wanted out heah."

"Who wants me?" came in a gruff voice from inside.

"Wal, I do, for one," shouted Saunders peremptorily. "You come out heah pronto."

Then the burly Hatfield appeared in the door, swaggering a little, the same bold-eyed, handsome rider Georgiana had seen so often. But at sight of her his dark face turned livid. He halted short.

"Hatfield," said Saunders curtly "heah's Cal Thurman's wife, an' she's made a damn serious charge against you."

The several faces in the doorway behind Hatfield attached themselves to forms that stalked out into the sunlight. This fact was repeated until half a dozen staring riders had lined up outside the cabin.

At sight of Hatfield and the sudden blanching of his face Georgiana sustained a rush of passion that held her a moment in its grip. It was more thought of Cal than wrong to herself that stirred her fury.

Before she could speak, Saunders and all of the riders wheeled quickly to gaze down the road. A cloud of dust had puffed up beyond the curve. Then Georgiana heard the rapid beat of hoofs. Horsemen hove in sight, riding on a run.

"What the hell!" ejaculated Saunders. "Who's rarin' in heah this way?"

"Boss, it's some of the Four T outfit," called a rider.

"Thurman, huh! Wal, you-all stand pat," ordered Saunders.

Georgiana really did not get the full gist of this talk until she recognized Enoch, and then Tim Matthews. She was sure another was Arizona, and another Panhandle Ames. The sudden shift of her sensations from wrath to amazement left her trembling. She became aware of Tuck's big hand on hers, as if to reassure her.

How those riders were pounding down the road! The white foam flew above dust. In a dark compact mass this half-dozen or more horses swept down on the cabin. They were pulled back on their haunches, and scattering the gravel they slid to a halt. But scarcely a second before every rider landed with thudding boots and jingling spurs on the ground. Georgiana saw then she had been right in her recognition, and the others were Boyd, Serge, and Lock Thurman. They made a somber, menacing group, from which Enoch stalked out slowly, with his gray eyes glinting. A gun swung at his hip.

"Howdy, Saunders," he drawled.

"Howdy, Enoch," replied the rancher.

"Some one phoned us to come hell-bent for election over heah," went on Enoch. "Reckon we was comin' anyhow, but as we didn't care much aboot that phone call we rode some."

"So I see," replied Saunders dryly, indicating the foam-lashed, heaving horses. "An' damned if I ain't glad to see you, Enoch."

"Ahuh! Wal, what's up?" queried Enoch sharply, as his eyes flashed from Saunders to his men, then back to Tuck Merry and Georgiana.

"'Pears to me there's a heap up," answered Saunders. "Cal's wife is heah,

as you see, an' she can shore speak for herself. She's come to make Bid Hatfield prove his brag or eat his words."

Tuck Merry pressed Georgiana's hand hard and whispered fiercely in her ear, "Now—hand it to him!"

Georgiana lifted her gloved hand and pointed quiveringly at the livid rider.

"Now, Bid Hatfield—say to my face—that I'm not an honest girl," she called out in ringing, passionate scorn. "Everybody can tell the truth. Show me up, if I'm what you say. If you have anything on me tell it now. Tell me to my face in front of all these men!"

Manifestly the situation was a terrible one for Hatfield. The surprise of her confronting him in daring scorn completely unmanned him.

"Aw, Georgie, it was all Tonto gossip. I never said anythin' bad against you."

"You're a liar!" flashed Georgiana. "Everybody knows you've talked. And if you're not a white-livered coward you'll tell the truth. You'll confess you lied to defame me."

"But, Georgie, I didn't say what—what you have heard," he replied hoarsely.

"All right. If you're not man enough to own up you'll do this. You'll answer me before these men. You told that I let you kiss me, didn't you?"

"Maybe I did—when I was drunk or mad," he replied, dropping his head.

"Didn't I stop letting you kiss me—because you tried to go too far—and didn't I quit meeting you?" Georgiana demanded in all the intensity of her blazing anger.

"Yes—you did," returned Hatfield huskily.

"That's all *you* need say, Bid Hatfield. But I'm going to say more," she cried, with all the lashing fury now roused in her. "I told Mr. Saunders the truth.

I'm not ashamed to tell anybody. I liked you. I let you kiss me—the same as I let Cal and Tim, and Arizona. It was all fun to me. I see now that it was wrong. I'm sorry I was so silly. I've had to suffer for it. But a girl deserves to suffer if she lets herself be kissed by a man who's a cad. To kiss and tell! That is the cheapest, meanest thing a man can do. I'll bet every rider here, your best friends, if you have any, will despise you for that. And for the lies you told—I'm calling you to your face—a dirty low-down bum!"

Georgiana was not by any means through with Hatfield, but as she paused for breath, momentarily overcome, the sudden silence was broken by Tuck Merry.

"Aha! Mr. Bruiser," he yelled as he bounced with remarkable agility off his horse, "the lady has got your number. She's called you. Every man here knows you for a dirty low-down bum. And right now is when it's coming to you."

Hatfield had half turned to slink away when Merry opened up in his loud voice. Slowly the burly rider faced around, scowling, with rolling eyes fixing in surprise.

Tuck Merry just then commanded the intense attention of everybody there. His voice, his strange magnetism, his ludicrous jumping-jack form, riveted all eyes. Georgiana began to quake and thrill. She had forgotten any part but her own in this affair.

Tuck slammed down his sombrero, and slipping out of his coat he slammed that down. His gloves he kept on, and as he began to prance around Hatfield he fingered these gloves in a significant manner.

"Walk away from the ropes. Get out here in the ring," called Tuck.

"Say, you goose-necked idiot—shut up, or I'll wring off your big head," harshly growled Hatfield. With a man to encounter he presented a different front.

"Now you're talkin, Bid. That's music to my ears. Sing some more. You are the most beautiful hunk of flesh to pound I ever saw. You're also a hunk of cheese."

Hatfield was as bewildered as enraged. He had to keep turning round and round to watch Tuck, who was walking with giant strides round and round, working his enormously long arms.

"Say, the feller's crazy," he bawled out.

Enoch laughed a dry, cackling sort of laugh. "Wal, Bid," he drawled, "he may be crazy, but I shore wouldn't be in your boots for a million."

Hatfield crouched down like a mad bull, about to charge.

"Bid, have you any messages you want sent?" queried Tuck, as he walked faster and faster. "Tell them to somebody while I get exercise. I used to do this when I was boxing-master in the navy. Bid, I'm a fighting marine and I've licked every buddy who got inside the ropes with me."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared Bloom, from among the excited riders crowding forward. "Do you git that, Bid?"

"And say, before I forget, I want to tell you I was Jack Dempsey's sparring partner," shouted Tuck cheerfully. "And take it from me, my lady-chasing Tonto bulldozer, Jack had a hell of a lot more trouble with me than he had in some of his ring fights."

"You're a bloomin' lunatic," blurted out Hatfield.

Suddenly, then, Tuck seemed to leap and strike in one incredibly swift action. Hatfield fell with a crash. And

Georgiana screamed. Fascinated, gripped in a hot fury of delight that sickened as it thrilled, she listened and watched with senses intensely strung. She recorded Tuck's cheerful sally as Hatfield went sprawling, and that picture was photographed on her memory.

The rider rolled up and rushed, only to meet a cracking blow that staggered him. He reeled. Tuck danced round him, his arms working like pistons, and his blows raining upon Hatfield. And it seemed he had a strange name for everything. The riders bawled, and jumped around like Indians. Hatfield swung here and there, and then he would jolt stiff and start to fall, only to be held up from the other side by another blow. Tuck Merry was too swift to follow.

Suddenly he ceased these tactics, and drawing back quickly, all about him changed.

"Damn your black heart!" he hissed. "You rough-housed Cal Thurman. Now I'll give you worse than you gave him."

Like a huge panther Merry leaped straight up to fall hard on Hatfield, carrying him down. A terrible wrestling, thudding, howling melee ensued. The men rolled in a cloud of dust. Then it seemed to Georgiana that it cleared to show Tuck Merry in terrific swinging action. Not so swift now, but heavy! His blows rang hard, then sounded sodden. They were terrible. Hatfield appeared like a sack. Every blow moved him limply.

Georgiana shut her eyes, but still she heard the awful blows. Then they ceased. She opened her eyes. Tuck Merry rose to his feet and looked down upon the prone form of the rider, singularly motionless. Tuck took off one

glove and slammed it down in Hatfield's face; then likewise with the other.

"That'll—do—you—for—the—rest of your yellow life!" he panted heavily. Then he turned to the rancher.

"Mr. Saunders—he's out—good and plenty," he said, gasping for his breath. "And I'm here to tell you—he won't be—much use to you—for a long time to come."

"Hatfield will never be any use to me again," returned Saunders curtly.

The riders stirred, and moved forward to group round Hatfield. One of them knelt. Some of them whispered. Georgiana began to feel the weakening reaction of all this excitement.

Enoch strode over to gaze down upon Hatfield. "My Gawd!" was his exclamation.

Then Saunders clapped a heavy hand down on his shoulder. "Enoch, I never had much against you," he said.

"Wal, I can say the same to you aboot that," drawled Enoch.

"Listen. I'm letting Bloom go the end of this month. An' Hatfield leaves this ranch tomorrow if he has to go on a pack mule. Suppose you an' me shake hands with this plucky little girl an' with each other, an' be friends. The Four T's an' the Bar XX used to run the same range, an' were the richer for it. What do you say?"

"Jim Saunders, I say, *you bet*," returned Enoch heartily.

They stalked over to where Georgiana sat on her horse, thrilling through and through at this amazing issue.

"Little lady," said Saunders, with something of gallantry, "accept my respects. You're a brave girl, an' Cal Thurman is lucky. You can tell him you made friends with the boss of the Bar XX."

"Georgie, I shore think heaps more of you," said Enoch, and a handshake was not enough to express his feelings.

Georgiana would not let any of the riders, not even Tuck Merry, accompany her any farther than the forks of the trail. She wanted to ride home alone, to think, to plan, to gloat over her wonderful good fortune. She arrived at the homestead scarcely later than the middle of the afternoon, to find Cal pacing the porch.

"Georgie, where have you been?" he asked.

She dismounted before replying, and threw her bridle.

"Cal, what'd you say if I told you I have made friends of Enoch and Jim Saunders?"

Cal flopped down on the porch bench as if the strength had suddenly left his legs.

"You've been over to the Bar XX?" he ejaculated wildly.

"Yep, and, dear boy, it's a cinch you'll never have to go there again."

"What've you done?" he demanded, rising from the bench in mingled anger and wonder.

"Darling, I called Bid Hatfield to his face," cried Georgiana, suddenly beside herself with the joy she could impart. "Made him a liar and a miserable low-down bum before his boss and all the Bar XX outfit, and Enoch, too, with Lock and Serge and Boyd, and the boys. Oh, it was sweet.—Damn him, I made him crawl!"

"Then, oh! oh! oh!—Cal, if you'd only been there to see Tuck Merry beat that boob into a jellyfish! Crack! Take that nose jab, Bid. And biff! There's a jaw-breaker. Wham! That's the bellywhopper. Bing! How you like the lamp-closer, Bid? Smash! That one gave me the

name of Tuck, 'cause a few of them will tuck you away cold! oh, Cal, he played with Hatfield, but it was awful play! Then he changed. He grew terrible. He said he'd rough-house Bid as Bid had done you.

"Then it was almost too much for me. I screamed. Oh, such blows and thumps! But I was in a frenzy of glee and I wouldn't have stopped Tuck to save Bid's life. Nor would anybody else there. Tuck beat him into a pulp. Then it was all over. Saunders had his say and he and Enoch made up. They shook hands with me—thanked *me*. Little Georgiana May did it. Now what have you to say?"

Cal could only stammer his wonder, his gratitude, his incredulous joy.

"Forget it!" she exclaimed. "I've something better than that to tell you. Suppose we run out to the point—to your juniper tree on the mesa rim—where you told me you used to dream as a boy—of all the wonderful things that were going to happen to you. Let me tell you *there*.—Come."

She kept ahead of him, almost running, not listening to him, uttering gay wild laughter. She entered the belt of timber, glided under the cedars and piñons, over the brown fragrant aisles to the rim, where the gnarled old juniper stood. And there with her back to the tree she awaited Cal. He came, and never had she seen him like that. The

light in his face seemed to have transformed the stains and discolorations that had been there. Georgiana toyed with her happiness—jealously holding back the rapture she could give.

"Did you know you had married an heiress?" she asked archly.

"Georgie, are you crazy, or am I?" he cried.

"Fact. A good old aunt I always hated died and left Mary and me some money. Lots of money. But that's not what I want to tell you. I'm a changed girl. Are you sure you didn't give me that knock on the head, the day you married me?"

"Oh, Georgie! I didn't lie. It was an accident."

"Well, you *should* have done it. For that's what made me love you."

"Girl! Don't fool with me now," he said hoarsely.

Then she threw her arms round his neck. "Cal, I'm in dead earnest. I love you. I think I've always loved you. I was only wild. Kiss me! Let me make up for my wrong to you. I'm happy. You saved me, Cal. And I—I want to be worthy of a Thurman—I want to be your real wife!"

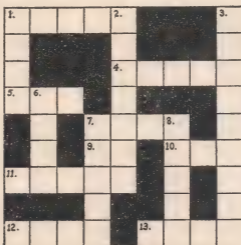
Together they watched the gold and purple clouds mass over the western range and the purple shadows gather in the wild depths of the Tonto.

THE END



A WEST ACROSTIC

FOR A CHANGE OF GAIT in our Western quiz series, and especially to satisfy those readers who are puzzle fans, here's a cross-acrostic which consists mainly of Western words. In case you aren't familiar with the term "cross-acrostic", that's just a five-buck word for a type of crossword puzzle which does not have a regular diagram, but in which at least one letter of each word serves in another word. But you won't need a special Western dictionary for this one—you should be able to hog-tie and brand it in about five minutes. But we won't make any (13 across), on it! Solution on page 158.



DEFINITIONS

Across

1. Poor li'l calf that's lost it's mammy.
4. This indispensable cowboy tool came from south of the Border.
5. Down Texas way this is what a saddle's called.
7. A kind of case that's always on the prod.
9. Conjunction.
10. If the villain's after the heroine's ranch it's probably because there's either gold or — on it.
11. Bucking horse.
12. Take the roundup's remount and drop a Roman 5.

Across

13. From (3 down) drop the second, fourth, and sixth, and define what's left.

Down

1. If you're on a (11 across) you're on the hurricane—.
2. If (1 across) doesn't have this, he'll get one when he's found.
3. They get up bright and early and bring the hosses in.
6. Climate fever (colloquial).
7. Half of a wild dance hall.
8. Take (1 across), change the middle, and get a Western author's name.



Russ Baker can't help
wondering if he is

Too Good With a Gun

By

Lewis B. Patten

THEY rode through the thin warmth of this bright winter's day, a man and a girl, together on the bouncing seat of the grayed and weathered buckboard, very conscious of one another each time their bodies touched, laughing and red of face by turns.

Behind rode the boy, Claude, jogging gently in the rising dust. Suddenly he tugged at his sorrel's reins and as the horse fell behind, called to Russ Baker, "I'll catch up later," his fifteen-year-old mind dimly shocked by the man's antics.

Shaking out his rope, he dropped an experimental loop over a near-by clump of greasewood, rearing back in the saddle to tighten it as the blocky mustang braced to a stop.

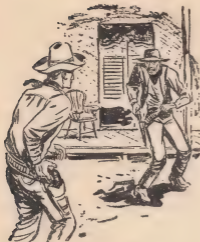
He slid off the horse, running as he hit the ground. Grinning triumphant-ly, he reached the end of the tightened lariat in a matter of seconds. Pulling slack into the rope, he loosened the loop and slipped it off the spiny brush, then tensed abruptly and fell into a half-crouch. Easily, still crouching, he

turned and his slim brown hand dropped swiftly. His gun cleared its holster and racketed across the wide valley as it bucked in his hand. A rock across the road shot off dust and Claude grinned, widely now as he holstered the gun.

The horse, startled, was moving away trailing the lariat in the dust. Claude broke into a run, caught the end of the rope and jerking on it, yelled, "Whoa, Steady now."

The horse turned to face him obediently, backing gently as slack came into the rope. Again the boy let the grin cross his narrow, smooth face and he tipped his hat back on his head and swaggered to the horse, coiling the rope as he went. He mounted, kicked the horse into a run, and with a yell took after the buckboard.

He had meant to ride up behind the buckboard, shooting and yelling as a badman might, attacking a stage, but the sight of Russ Baker, blushing and grinning foolishly beside Claude's sister Edie, changed his mind and brought



a look of disgust to his face. He felt ashamed for Russ and the shame touched him too, so great was his liking and respect for the man. That this slim, taciturn rider should let a slip of a girl change him so was beyond belief.

He came up behind, not noticing the dust, and let his horse trot, its muzzle a foot from the rear of the buckboard. His head dropped onto his chest in an attitude of bored relaxation, but the eyes were alive and bright in their blackness and occasionally the full lips moved, tightening or twisting. Once he snarled under his breath, "Draw, you dirty sidewinder," his hand hanging clawlike over the holstered grip of his gun and his body growing tense.

The town of Four-Mile came into sight and Russ slowed the team. Edie brushed the dust carefully from her clothes and took on a prim expression and sat in the far corner of the seat, away from Russ.

Claude never paid much attention to Edie, but as she got down in front of Hatfield's store and walked across the

board sidewalk, he noticed how pretty she was. Maybe it was the soft expression on her face or the way she moved her body, feeling Russ Baker's eyes upon her.

Claude was dismounting, eyeing the green batwing doors of the saloon, and he wondered how long it would be before he could drum up enough nerve to walk down there and go on through them. Russ tied the team to the rail and Claude climbed up in the seat beside him. Russ looked at the boy, grinning with the hard, tight muscles of his face.

"Jist as well take it easy, Claude. She'll be a while."

Claude looked at this man, seeing him now as he had always been, without the change on him that came when he was with Edie. He said, "I busted a rock back there, drawin' an' whirlin' at the same time," unconscious of the pride in his voice, his eyes waiting for the man's approbation. Instead he saw the uneasiness and the regret coming into Russ's face and the man spoke softly.

"Your pa an' ma feel pretty strong about gun-fightin'. They give you that gun for varmints, not men. They jumped all over me for teachin' you as much as I have. You'd best forget it. I reckon a man gets along better in this world if he don't use a gun too good."

He stopped and the feeling that he was talking too much was plain on him but he still had something on his mind, something that rankled within him. "Your pa thinks, an' mebbe he's right, that I'm too good with my gun to be good for Edie."

Claude thought about that, thought about how right Pa was most of the time, thought about how much he liked this lanky puncher. He wished Pa

could see Russ like he did. He saw the brightness of Edie's dress through the open door of the store, saw the heavy shape of Mr. Hatfield beside her. He took his eyes away, letting them drift on down the street again toward the saloon and he felt the helplessness in him because of his age.

He said with a surly impatience, "A man ought to know how to use a gun."

A horseman came down the street and dismounted behind the buckboard, tying his horse beside Claude's at the hitchrail. He grinned at Claude and came over, a friendly man, well liked and universally respected. He wore a gun, as most men did, but it was rusty.

Arnold Hoffman put a big calloused hand on Claude's shoulder and said "How are you, boy? How's your pa an' ma?" but then Russ turned and the man forgot Claude and said, "I'll buy you a drink, Russ."

Russ started to move and then, looking at the doorway of the store, shook his head, "Another time. I'm waiting for Edie."

Claude felt his throat tightening and he wanted to say. "I'll drink with you," but he couldn't make his voice come out. In a moment it was too late and Arnold was striding away. Now the boy made his lips move: *I'll drink with you*, silently, and after clearing his throat, again: "I'll drink with you," his face consciously without expression.

Russ turned. "What did you say?" But Claude only got hot and red of face. He muttered, "Nothin'."

Old man Hatfield's voice droned on inside the store and after a while another man came from the hotel and stopped on his way to the saloon to stand in front of the buckboard and stare hard at Russ.

His voice had a soft, sibilant sound

to it. "Russ Baker! I'll be damned. You're a long ways from home."

Claude felt the tightening and the straightening up of the man in the seat beside him. He heard a voice but it did not sound like Russ's usual, easy drawl.

Russ said, "Hello, Slick," and the silence grew heavy as the two men stared, warily and with obvious dislike at one another. Then the other man, thin and sardonic of face, went on by and entered the saloon. There was something about him that lingered behind, making Claude feel uneasy without knowing why.

He asked, strongly curious, "You know him, Russ? He's a stranger here."

"Knew him in Texas. Slick Everitt." Claude whistled. "The gun fighter?" and when Russ nodded, a boy's awe came into Claude's face. He had not seen anything prepossessing about Everitt but the man had a reputation that was well known. He said, "Gee, I hope I get to be as good as him someday."

Russ laughed, a harsh, bitter laugh. "No. Not 'as good as him,' boy, because there ain't no 'good' in him. He's a human rattlesnake and there ain't a bit more feelin' in him than in a snake."

The minutes ran on, dragged into an hour, but Everitt had left something behind with the two on the buckboard seat. They could not take their minds from him. Edie came out once, smiling at them, and put some packages into the buckboard.

When she saw their faces she said, "Don't look so grim. It won't be long now."

After a while over the stillness of the street, Claude heard a table crash an angry shout. Then he heard the low murmur of a man's voice, steadily cursing. An uneasiness touched him and he felt Russ straightening up beside him.

The batwings of the saloon swung open and Arnold Hoffman and the gun fighter, Everitt, came out together, propelled by Big Nick Bidwell, the saloonman, who had a huge, powerful hand grasping each of their arms. The steady cursing came from Everitt, bubbling from his thin lips in a revolting stream. Hoffman wore an angry flush on his ordinarily open and friendly face.

Big Nick growled, "I had that back-bar mirror freighted from Salt Lake. I'll not have it broken now."

Everitt left off his cursing long enough to say, "I'll settle you when I'm through with this one."

Big Nick gave a little shove and the man staggered across the walk, nearly falling as he went into the street. He swung, crouching, the bright eyes resting on Big Nick for a moment and then going to Hoffman.

Russ Baker was moving next to Claude. He was down off the buckboard and around in front of the horses before Claude was scarcely aware of his movement. Everitt had his pale eyes on Arnold Hoffman and he stood there in an easy way, but tense and sure.

He said, "You want to tangle with me and you got a gun. Use it." As he watched Arnold his eyes betrayed a hot and vicious pleasure.

Claude could see surprise and sudden knowledge of how this argument must end in Arnold's face. Arnold knew he was up against a gun fighter and he knew that he would die. Claude watched the play of expression on the man's face, felt a little sickened as he saw it go gray with fear, felt the man's shame with him for a moment, and then saw the hopeless courage come into the eyes. He moved his glance to Everitt and saw the evil there in the

predatory, waiting stance, in the pale eyes. He thought of a rattler and saw no more pity here than he would in a striking snake.

He felt a little sick, knowing that Arnold would die, but then Russ called out, "Slick. Turn around this way."

Slick Everitt spoke without turning. "This ain't none of your business, Baker. Keep out of it."

Russ's voice had a slow, deep quality. "No. This ain't my business. Somethin' else is. I told you once that there wasn't a town big enough for the both of us. Reckon you forgot. You won't again."

Some of the sureness went out of Everitt as he faced Russ. The surprise that came to his face as Russ spoke puzzled Claude as did his words, never finished, "You're a liar. You never—"

Russ cut him short: "All right. All right. You've said enough."

Arnold's relief and gratitude were naked things, unconcealed as his face trembled in the extremity of his emotion. Russ kept his eyes steadily on Slick. Claude had felt proud and less afraid as Russ called to the killer but now his fear came back tenfold, fear for his friend.

He saw a bright movement behind Russ in the door of the store and Edie came out onto the walk. Russ said irritably, "Edie, get back in the store," but Edie just stood there, uncomprehending, until Hatfield caught her arm and pulled her in.

Claude's thoughts cried out, *Why'd you do it, Russ? Why'd you step into Arnold's fight? Now it's you that's—*

Things happened fast then. Claude's last impression was of the pitiless evil in the gun fighter's eyes and of surprise that Russ did not show more change. Then the guns came out and spoke

across the narrow distance between the two, Russ's a shade faster, Everitt's so close afterward that the two reports nearly mingled. But the shock of Russ's bullet spoiled the other's aim. The evil and the life went out of Everitt's eyes and was replaced by a blankness. He grunted softly and then limply collapsed into the dust.

Russ shoved his gun back into its holster and stood there looking at the lifeless body before him until Edie spoke behind him: "Russ! Oh no!" her young face stricken.

After that there was a crowd and confusion and Edie went back into the store with another woman, weeping brokenly, and Russ did not want to talk to Claude or to anyone. Excitement was so strong in the boy that he hopped up and down from the ground to the seat of the buckboard and back again.

Edie came out, her face red and a little mottled, not looking at Russ and Arnold went around to her and said, "I know how you folks feel about gun-fightin', but he done it for me, Edie."

Russ's face was pale and completely without expression as he climbed up into the buckboard. Edie sat far in the corner of the seat, looking straight ahead. Claude tied his horse behind as soon as the buckboard had been backed out and got up between them. The ride home was a misery, with them both strangers to him and to each other.

After he had unhitched the team and put them away, Claude stood in the quiet dimness of the barn and automatically his hand fell to his gun, practicing, but he lifted it away again, shaking his head a little, the cold smoothness of the gun feeling strange and unfamiliar.

Mack Duncan came in and looked at his son and he was puzzled and won-

dering whether to be angry or not. He asked, "What in the devil is the matter with Edie and Russ? What'd Russ do to her?"

"Russ kilt Slick Everitt. Everitt was about to kill Arnold Hoffman over an argument an' Russ stepped in an' kilt him. Say, Pa, Russ knowed Everitt. But all he was aimin' to do was to git Arnold out of it."

He saw Pa's face harden and saw him tighten his jaw. "I knew it'd come out in him. It's good it came out now before him an' Edie—"

Pa swung around and went out of the barn. Claude had to hurry to catch up.

He cried, "Pa, don't send him away. He ain't no killer. He done it for Arnold."

Mack Duncan stopped and put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "You see why I don't like you foolin' with a gun all the time? It changes a man. He always has to wonder if he can beat somebody else. I don't want you to be like that."

Claude began, "But Pa," wanting to explain the difference between the killer, Everitt and Russ, but he didn't have the words.

Mack Duncan said sharply, "Don't you argue now. Git some wood for your ma."

It took three loads to fill the wood-box. As he was gathering up the last armful he saw Russ go to his little room in the shed that huddled in the shelter of the barn.

Edie was helping Ma in the kitchen, her eyes red, and as Claude came in she was saying, "He looked so calm standing there, like Pa would shooting a snake or a squirrel. But it was a man he shot. Oh Ma, I guess I don't know him at all."

Pa came in and Russ followed behind

and they sat down at the long table, except for Edie, who had gone to her room. Pa prayed, not quick and sloughing the words but slow, like he meant it. Then Ma put the food on the table and they set to.

Claude was ashamed for his ma and pa because they were so silent and still. He was opening his mouth to speak when Russ said, "Reckon I'll jist stay this month an' then go on back to Texas."

Ma looked relieved and Pa spoke, showing his shame and regret, but meeting Russ's eyes. "You been a good hand, Russ, but mebbe it's just as well." Russ knew what he meant, and so did Claude.

Claude burst out, "You ain't treatin' Russ right. He ain't done nothin' bad."

Pa glared and snapped out, "Claude!" but Claude wasn't finished. He was scared but he felt reckless too. He saw Russ shaking his head but he went on: "He saved Arnold from havin' to pull that rusty old gun an' gittin' kilt doin' it. He ain't done nothin' worse than killin' a rattler."

Mack Duncan half rose in his chair and caught Claude by his shirt front across the table. "Git up an' go to your room."

Claude left, but as he did, he saw Russ wiping his mouth and rising. Ma and Pa were left alone at the table.

Instead of going to his own room, Claude went to Edie's. She looked up as he came in, wiping tears from her eyes.

Claude said, "Pa's wrong this time. Russ is goin' away. I hope you're satisfied." Bitterness was in his voice.

He went to the window and looked out. Russ was cantering out of the yard and his saddle and bedroll made a lumped shape on the ground beside

the barn. Dusk lay over the yard, soft and heavy, and in a moment Russ was only a dark, blurred figure, growing smaller.

Claude told Edie bitterly, "Russ is leavin'. His saddle an' bedroll are there by the barn an' he's goin' after his pinto."

He heard Edie's small gasp of dismay almost lost in the squeak of the window as he forced it open. He said, "I'm goin' with him. He's no killer. I know him an' he's my friend."

He was on the ground then, outside the house, moving carefully so as not to be seen. He got his saddle and bedroll from the barn and caught a horse out of the corral. When he heard the thundering of Russ's driven horse and, farther back, the one he rode, he was saddled, wearing his heavy coat and ready.

The pinto thundered into the corral and Russ swung down and shut the gate. Claude clambered over the corral fence and approached. Sudden shyness gripped him. He knew what he wanted to say, but did not know how to say it.

He called, "Russ!" and went over to the waiting man. "I want to go with you," and after a pause, "Kin I?"

He could not see Russ's face but he thought Russ was angry. The man's voice sounded strained.

"No. You belong here, helpin' your pa." Russ's hand laid on Claude's shoulder and gripped it. "You go with me an' you'll wind up driftin' from place to place with nothin' but a twenty-dollar horse to call your own. Stay, an' you'll be a cowman. like your pa an' Arnold Hoffman. You could do worse. Your pa's a fine man."

"But I don't want to be like Pa an' Arnold. I want to be like you."

Russ's voice hardened and the boy knew he was really angry now. He rasped, "Or like Slick Everitt maybe? No. Anyhow, what would I do with a kid taggin' along? Go on up to the house now an' let me be."

Somehow Claude could not argue with Russ like he could with Pa. He turned and went out of the corral, a smarting behind his eyes. He saw another shape running from the house and ducked into the shadow of the barn. He heard Edie's timid, breathless voice, "Russ," and the clanking of Russ's spurs as he crossed to her.

Claude could just see the dim shapes of the two of them, Russ so tall and still, Edie small beside him. He knew he had no business listening, but he couldn't make his feet move. Edie's voice came so softly that Claude could scarcely hear.

"Russ, I'm sorry. I was wrong." Claude heard her sudden sobbing and saw the two figures merge. Edie cried, "I'll go with you if you want me."

He never heard Russ's answer if there was one. A dozen men came riding into the yard, kicking up dust that swirled before the streak of light from the open door of the house. Claude saw Pa's big shape there, and Ma's smaller, stout one.

A man called out, "Where's Russ? We come to see Russ." It was Arnold's voice.

Pa's voice was big and rough like himself. "You'll likely find him out to

the barn. Come on in an' I'll send Claude after him."

Russ and Edie came away from the corral and passed Claude there in the shadows without seeing him. They were talking softly.

The men were dismounting and two of them led the horses away toward the corral. Russ and Edie followed into the house and Claude tagged behind.

Arnold was talking to Pa and he said, "There's been too much trouble in town an' we've got together to ask Russ to be the marshal. Bein' easy with a gun is a trick a marshal has to have, an' with a man like Russ on the job there won't be much shootin'."

He saw Russ then, standing in the kitchen doorway. "How about it Russ?"

Russ looked at Edie and Edie at Russ. Pa saw the look that was passing between the two. He shrugged only lightly and then he swallowed a couple of times, looking at the floor. When he looked up he was beginning to smile.

He said, "'Pears like you'll have to ask both of them, Arnold. Looks like it might be that way now."

He laughed and Claude, who knew Pa and his way of oblique apology, grinned suddenly, letting his eyes go from Pa's face to Russ's and back again, feeling good. Edie ran to Pa, crying and laughing at the same time.

Pa said, "Reckon I couldn't see Russ fer lookin' at that gun hangin' at his side."





SOLID CITIZEN

By Calvin L. Boswell

COMING up out of the gulch, Bona-
parte Biggs began to whistle as he
passed the new fieldstone firehouse at
the edge of town. He thrust his hands
in his pockets and breasted this warm
mountain morning with a lilt in his
stride. Roaring Fork was astir early,
for all its being Sunday; the spit-and-
argue boys were comfortably parked
on their shoulder blades along the
Pioneer House, and George Iver was
brooming out the front of his livery
stable.

Ed Rainey came out of the Long Tom
to throw a bucketful of water in the
street and paused, letting his gaze

*SINCE he isn't placering enough
gold out of his claim to convince
Henrietta Gault she should marry
him, Bonaparte Biggs sets out to
make a solid citizen of himself.
First publication.*

travel from Bonny's black derby to his
newly greased boots. He said, "Kind
of spruced up, ain't you? Weddin' or
a funeral?"

Bonny rolled his eyes at Ed and
smoothed out his fawn-colored mus-
tache. "You know darn well we ain't
had a candidate for Boot Hill since
Smiley Spivens got hung for robbin'

the Hangtown stage. So you can jump to your own conclusion."

"Which leaves a weddin'," Ed observed. "Seems you been wearin' a path to the widow Gault's lately. When is it goin' to be?"

"Soon, I hope. She promised to give me her answer today."

Bonny left Ed grinning and shaking his head and continued up the narrow street. On a side street beyond Sam's barbershop he turned in at a neat, sign that read: Henrietta Gault, Dress-maker. He went half the length of the graveled walk and stopped like a man abruptly confronting a grizzly.

Henrietta's cottage made a right pretty picture with the honeysuckle vines crawling up the front of the porch, but Micajah spoiled it. Micajah was Henrietta's brother, and a more worthless hunk of human Bonny had never known. He sat on the top step with his big arms dangling over his knees and his heavy jaw working at a quid of tobacco. He spat in Bonny's general direction and wiped his meaty lips with the back of his hand.

"So it's the runt again." He had a voice like a shovel scraping on rock. "Minute I go over to Nevada City you start hangin' around. I thought I told you to stay away from here."

Bonny arched his neck and glared at Micajah. "I was kind of hopin' you'd fall in a mine shaft and never come back? You afraid if I marry Henrietta you'll lose your meal ticket?"

Micajah growled deep in his chest and his licorice-drop eyes got bright and hard and mean. He reared to his feet and started down off the steps and then checked up short, swinging about as a voice came from within the house:

"Micajah! Stop that!"

"Aw, Sis—"

"You hear me? Now take your lazy carcass out of here. Get on with you!" Henrietta pushed open the door and strode to the edge of the porch. Micajah wheeled, scowling heavily; he mumbled something that Bonny didn't hear and plowed through the gate and went on down the street.

Henrietta had been basting up a new costume for Councilman Finney's wife, and wore a checkered apron over her brown dress. A handsome, full-fleshed woman, she smoothed her Indian-black hair with her arm and said in a warm contralto, "Come on up, Bonny."

Bonny took off his derby and began to turn it nervously in his fingers as he stepped forward. He swallowed and kind of fumbled for words. "I—uh—come for my answer, Henrietta."

"So I gathered." She sighed and dropped into the ladder-backed rocker she'd brought across the plains from Vermont. Bonny stood there with pure worship shining out of his eyes while she rocked and nursed her lower lip with her fine white teeth and finally said, "I've been thinking about it; and I'm afraid it wouldn't work out. Not the way things are."

Hurt and disappointment washed the anticipation out of Bonny's face. "Why not?" he asked plaintively. "Is it somethin' I've done?"

She shook her head. "It's what you haven't done. I supported my first husband till he got himself shot in a poker game. Now it's Micajah, and I'm afraid it'll be you, too. I want something solid when I get married."

"But I'm one of the solidest citizens in this here part of California!" Bonny objected. "I own a placer claim, don't I?"

She said, "One of these days it'll play

out, and then where'll you be? Plumb busted like a lot of these other miners. Like Micajah. You've got to have something more substantial than a two-bit claim which don't do much more than feed those four big Kanakas you've got working it. Either that or let them go and run it yourself so you can at least make a fair kind of living."

"Good gosh, Henrietta, I can't! They been with me ever since they got fed up with slavin' for Cap'n Sutter and run away. I give 'em a job and a place to sleep when the claim was payin' good, and now they figure they belong to me."

Henrietta shook her head with clear regret. "Maybe I'm asking too much, Bonny; but goodness knows I don't want to work *all* my life. I want to wear nice dresses myself for a change, and ride in a carriage maybe, and live in a big white house on the hill like the McCarthys and the Cantrells."

Bonny would have argued further, but he knew that Henrietta had a will as hard as bedrock, and when she made up her mind it stayed put. With a lump in his throat the size of an eagle's egg he turned and stumbled blindly out the gate.

He got halfway down the main street before he swam up out of his scalding misery enough to notice that Roaring Fork was acting mighty peculiar. It resembled a nest of wood ants that's been spaded up. Kids were hollering and jumping around and dogs were barking and the grown folk were pouring out of houses and shops and heading toward the lower end of town. Lem Povey went by with his long, thin legs eating up the ground like oversized scissor blades and Bonny's natural curiosity began to itch.

"Hey, what in tarnation's got into everybody?"

Lem turned his head, still putting distance between himself and Bonny. "Ain't you heard? The new hand pumper for the fire department just got in from Frisco."

Bonny increased his pace, half running to keep up with those long legs of Lem's. Word had spread along the gulch and the miners were streaming in, and by now there was quite a passel of folks standing around Joe Trasker's freight wagon, their "Oh's" and "Ah's" making an awed chorus as they admired the blue and gold goose-neck fire engine sitting on the wagon bed.

Lem said admiringly, "Ain't she a doozer, Bonny? Ain't she a ding-whistler, though?"

Bonny stood on tiptoe and craned his neck but he could see only backs. Finally he scrooged his way through the crowd and came out beside Joe Trasker's left wheel horse. He worked down along the wagon as a dozen husky miners swung the fire engine to the street where it stood glittering-proud in the bright August sun.

Fat Alcade McCathy was there, he being first at every gathering whether it was for a hanging or a christening. A politician's grin creased his pudgy jowls as he held up his hands and said unctuously, "Don't crowd now, folks. Just take it easy so's everybody can have a look."

Willie Mixler, who owned the harness shop, stuck his head over Mrs. Innes's shoulder and yelled, "Hey, Tim, who's goin' to run that thing now that we got it?"

"Why," said the alcade, "maybe you, Willie, and whatever other civic-minded male citizens might care to step forward."

Joe Trasker had been prying open several boxes that had come with the fire engine. Now he brought out an even dozen shiny red helmets and a like number of double-breasted crimson shirts with big mother-of-pearl buttons down the front.

"That's for me!" Willie yelled. "I'll volunteer, Tim!"

Practically every man jack in the crowd yelled, too. They began to surge forward like a herd of steers smelling water and Bonny was shoved and jostled and mauled around, finally grabbing hold of the wagon stakes to keep himself upright. Through one of the spaces between them he found himself staring at a snow-white chief's helmet.

Memory swept the gloom off his face and he grinned and snapped his fingers. He'd been present at the last meeting of the town council, where it had been decided that the fire department was to be run on a strictly volunteer basis except for the chief, who would be regularly employed at a salary of two hundred dollars a month. Henrietta had wanted something she could depend on. Here it was!

He ducked beneath the wagon while the twelve lucky men were donning their red shirts and helmets. He came out under the tailgate and bobbed up in front of the alcade.

"Hey," he said breathlessly, "I'd like to put in my bid for that chief's job!"

Alcade McCarthy tilted his head and peered at Bonny over the round convexity of his paunch. He started to laugh and kind of choked it back, clearing his throat and dropping his big paw on Bonny's shoulder in a gesture that was meant to be one of kindly regret.

"I'm sorry, Bonny. Nothing personal, you understand, but we—ah—have cer-

tain requirements as to size. A man needs heft in this kind of work."

One of the boys shouted, "Let's try her out!" and Bonny's protest was lost in the excitement as several of them coupled on the suction line and hauled it over to the livery-stable watering-trough while two more uncoiled the long, thin fire hose. The rest of the boys began to argue about who would man the pump brakes whose horizontal arms stuck out the sides.

Alcade McCarthy broke it up before they came to blows, selecting four of them and promising the others a turn. They fell to with shouts and grins and began to pump up and down, filling the hundred-and-fifty gallon reservoir in the machine. Pretty soon a fair to-middling stream spouted up out of the nozzle and the crowd began to chant "Make it bigger! Make it bigger!"

The boys doubled their efforts, grunting with every stroke. In no time at all those new red shirts began to darken up with sweat-patches; their grins got crooked and their eyes began to pop while the folks kept egging them on with whoops and yells.

Willie Mixler was the first to give up. He suddenly let go of his end of the brake and stepped back, taking off his helmet and mopping at his streaming forehead.

"Shucks," he panted, "I thought this was goin' to be fun. You can have your volunteer job, Tim; she's too tough for me."

The other boys quit, too, and Alcade McCarthy waved his fat hands at the remaining volunteers. "How about it men? You wanted a turn, so step right up."

They looked at the fire engine, they looked at those four boys gulping for air like wind-sprung horses, and they

shook their heads and backed away like scared crawfish. The alcade was making a fruitless appeal to the rest of the men in the crowd when Bonny suddenly reached out and grabbed his arm.

"I got a proposition," he said. "If I get my four Kanakas to work that thing will you make me chief?"

The alcade said, "Hmmm." He surveyed his gang of reluctant volunteers and scratched his chin. "She sure ain't no good without somebody to pump her," he said. "I reckon you better round 'em up."

Bonny ran all the way down to the gulch. He found his Kanakas stripped to the waist, their bodies gleaming like brown sculpture as they shoveled gravel into the long sluice. They saw him from a distance and stopped work and stood there grinning like four big, woolly-haired kids until Bonny motioned urgently. Then they came trotting forward, accompanying him with doglike devotion to Roaring Fork.

Bonny quickly showed them how to operate the brakes. Laughing as though it were great sport, they took hold of the handles and bent their muscular backs into them and a stream broke out from the hose nozzle that was near as high as Steve Early's false-fronted feed store. A shout soared up from the crowd and Bonny whirled triumphantly on the alcade.

"How about it?" he demanded. "Do I get that job?"

Fat Tim McCarthy looked at those big Kanakas working as effortlessly and as tirelessly as machines; he looked at that noble stream of water and squinted down the end of his nose at the white helmet lying in the freight wagon. Then he grinned suddenly.

"Sure," he said. "Sure." He reached for the helmet and handed it to Bonny,

who removed his derby and put it on. It kind of rode down over his ears, but his chest swelled with pride just the same.

The alcade cleared his throat. "Ah—of course you understand this appointment ain't formal," he said, "until it's confirmed by the town council at their regular meeting the first of the month."

Bonny was too excited to smell a skunk in the alcade's woodpile. "I reckon that's all right with me," he said.

Right then everybody decided to hold a parade. At Bonny's order the Kanakas ceased pumping and the firemen coiled the hoses. They assembled in column-two's and marched to the end of the street and back again, Bonny strutting behind the alcade with the four Kanakas pulling the glittering fire engine as proud as you please and Roaring Fork's cheering citizens trooping along at the rear.

At the firehouse the alcade held up his hand and boomed, "Folks, there'll be a celebration tonight! Come one, come all! Plenty of dancin' and drinks for everybody!"

Bonny ducked through the crowd and made a beeline for Henrietta's house. He charged up the walk yelling, "Henrietta! Henrietta!"

She came to the porch with her mouth full of pins and Bonny struck a pose. "How do you like it?" he asked. "The alcade appointed me fire chief!"

Henrietta took the pins out of her mouth and her face lit up like a sunrise. "Bonny, no! How did it happen?"

Bonny explained about the Kanakas. "Ain't it wonderful?" he exclaimed. "With my two hundred dollars a month and what I get off the placer claim we can be married and live up on the hill just the way you wanted. I won't get confirmed till the town council meets,

but that shouldn't stop us from seein' the justice of the peace right away—Henrietta! What's the matter?"

Her happy look had faded; she was biting her lip. "Nothing, I hope. It's only that I just happened to remember what Mrs. Finney told me yesterday when she was over for a fitting. Your saying the town council had to confirm your appointment brought it to mind. She said that the alcade's brother was going to be chief as soon as he gets back from Sacramento. They've already decided on it."

Bonny's enthusiasm ran down like a clock with a busted spring. "You mean I been flummoxed?" he asked dully.

She shook her head. "I don't know, but we'd better wait and see before we go ahead with any plans. That Tim McCarthy's a sly one; I always said we made a mistake when we elected a baby-kissing politician to the office of alcade. I guess he didn't want to lose those Kanakas of yours and figures he can think of some way to wiggle out of his promise by that time."

Bonny took a breath and swelled up his muscles and his jaw got bunchy. "Why, that low-down, slipperty-tongued swamp critter! I'll get me a gun and—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Bonaparte Biggs!" Henrietta said firmly. "I'm not going to have you dancing a jig at the end of a lynch rope. Besides, maybe he really meant what he said."

Bonny ducked his head and ruffled up the gravel of the walk with the toe of his boot. He turned without a word and plodded out the gate. Henrietta raised her hand and opened her mouth as though to call him back, and then shut it again and shook her head sadly and walked into the cottage.

Bonny went straight to the Long Tom. He found Ed Rainey behind the

bar tending to his usual morning chore of polishing the glassware. Ed threw him a look and a grin and said, "That's some hat, Bonny. How's it feel to be chief?"

Bonny hooked his elbows over the bar. "Ed," he said mournfully, "take a good look at a disappointed, disgusted human bein'. And give me a shot of whisky."

"Hey, what's got into you? I never heard of you drinkin' anything stronger than creek water."

"Never mind. I want what I want."

Ed shrugged and slid a bottle and glass along the bar. Bonny poured himself a drink and downed it. He shuddered and gagged and had another. After the fourth in quick succession he set the whisky glass down two inches above the bar top. Its clatter turned Ed around as Bonny wheeled and marched woodenly toward the door. He collided with the jamb and Ed caught him as he fell backward, as stiff as a plank. Ed stuck his head outside and yelled at one of the boys sitting in front of the Pioneer House:

"Hey, Mike, you round up them Kanakas of Bonny's and tell them to get him home, will you? He just passed out."

Bonny was sure that a whopper of an earthquake had come along, the way he was being bounced around. He unglued his eyes and focused them with an effort and saw a lamp. Beyond it were his grinning Kanaka boys, their white teeth agleam in the light. He saw Henrietta bending over the bunk to give him another good shake.

"Bonny!" she cried. "Bonny!—"

Bonny hiccuped gently. "Disappointed," he muttered. "Disappointed and

drunk. Can't even take you to the shindig at the firehouse, Henrietta."

"The party's busted up! Micajah's in jail and they're going to take him out and lynch him!"

Bonny shuttered his eyes rapidly. "I thought you said somethin' about lynchin'," he murmured.

"Don't you understand?" Henrietta was frantic; she was weeping. "He's been arrested! Buff Rankin claimed he caught him robbing the sluices up the gulch while everybody was at the firehouse!"

That brought him out of it. He sat up and groaned and felt gingerly of the aching thing on his shoulders to see if it were really his head.

"Bonny, what are we going to do?"

He reached out and patted her arm. "Now don't you fret," he soothed. "Your brother won't be hung; not while I'm alive and kickin'."

Bonny was entertaining considerable doubt about his ability to kick by the time he climbed the hill with Henrietta whimpering at his shoulder and the four Kanakas trailing soberly behind. A full moon had risen over the yonder mountains and it was almost light enough to read a newspaper by. They heard the crowd's sullen mutter long before they reached the log jail a block beyond the now empty firehouse. Miners and townsmen, all of them dressed for the celebration, were fanned out in front of the building, and the threat of violence boiled up out of them like smoke.

Alcade McCarthy was there, playing his cards like a good politician by riding with the will of the town. He stood forth in front of them, shaking his big ham of a fist at the jail.

"Better let us have him, Abe!" he yelled. "You can't buck all of Roaring

Fork! We'll conduct a miner's court and try him fair and square."

Bonny saw the double-barreled shotgun sticking out of the barred front window. He heard Marshal Abe Wicklerly's calm drawl:

"And I'm tellin' you he's goin' to Nevada City for a jury trial. You take one step closer, Tim, and so help me I'll blast you to kingdom come."

Bonny squeezed Henrietta's cold hand and said, "You stay right here." He skirted the crowd and came forward, holding up his arm in a gesture of peaceful intent as the twin black holes at the end of the marshal's gun swung to bear on him. He faced Alcade McCarthy, he faced the crowd:

"Don't do anything you'll be sorry for! That man is entitled to a fair trial by jury!"

He saw their white faces turn and center upon him; he felt the wicked, wild flux of this mob's temper. A miner yelled out, "All sluice robbers ought to be hung and that goes for anybody what tries to interfere! Go crawl back in your hole before you get hurt, you runt!"

"You got to listen to reason!" Bonny cried, but his appeal was lost in the rumble of angry voices. A rock whizzed by his head and he ducked; a dry pine cone bounced off his shoulder and he grunted and dodged another rock. He saw the Kanakas moving forward, their white-toothed grins turned savage. He waved them back frantically, knowing that violence would explode with the devastating effect of blasting powder the minute they waded into that mob. He recreated, ducking a barrage of small stones, and joined Henrietta, who was weeping dismally.

"It's no use," she sobbed. "You'll only get yourself killed if you try to stop it."

Bonny said, "I ain't beat yet. There's still a chance we can maybe bust this up. Let's go get that new fire engine."

"But a little water won't do any good!"

"It's the only answer besides a gun. If somebody gets shot there'll be more than one man dead before it's over. Anyway, I've got an idea."

They wheeled and raced down the street to the firehouse. It was plain to see that the party had broken up at its height; the half-eaten food and the scattered jugs and bottles and the overturned benches told their own story. They'd decked the fire engine out in bunting and Bonny tore this off and opened the reservoir cover. It was filled to the brim—which was enough, if it had the effect he counted on, to do the job.

To Henrietta he said, "You take a couple of my Kanakas and run over to the general store. Break the door down if you have to, but get me some liquid soap and three or four pounds of lamp black. And hurry!"

It wasn't ten minutes till they were back with the lamp black and the soap; it wasn't ten more till the four Kanakas were pulling that fire engine at a fast trot up the street. They were halfway to the jail when the double blast of Marshal Wickerly's shot gun fell ominously across the night air and they heard the crowd's following roar of savage triumph.

As they drew closer they saw one of the red-shirted volunteers on the jail's flat roof, and Bonny realized what had happened. The man had dropped a larriat over the projecting muzzle and jerked the gun out of the marshal's hands. Now he was swinging it like a pendulum and uttering high rebel yells.

Bonny pointed at a vacant lot and

they quartered across it, raced along the alley and came up beside the jail. By now someone had found a log; half a dozen men were smashing it against the heavy plank door and the ominous, booming sound of it thundered all through the building. Alcade McCarthy stood beside them and he was shouting, urging the men on with motions of his thick arms.

Bonny turned to his Kanakas and said, "When I raise my hand you pump that thing like you never pumped before." They nodded and grinned like kids on a picnic as he uncoiled the fire hose and eased around the jail corner with Henrietta's "Be careful, Bonny!" lending him courage to face this wild crowd.

A man saw him and his yell soared upward and he instinctively drew back as his eye fell upon the glittering brass nozzle in Bonny's hands. Heads turned and these lynch-mad citizens pulled away, not relishing a bath in their Sunday clothes.

Tim McCarthy wheeled as Bonny cried, "You got one last chance to break up and go home peaceful before I let this thing loose!"

The alcade's little eyes squinched together and he swelled his cheeks. "You think a little water's goin' to stop us from doin' justice? Roaring Fork wants that sluice robber, and by Harry, Roaring Fork's goin' to—"

Bonny's hand went up in his signal to the Kanakas. The stuff that spouted out of that hose nozzle was water all right, but he'd mixed the liquid soap and the lamp black up in the reservoir, and the inky, bubbly stream hit the alcade's white shirt front dead-center. He squalled like a wounded cougar and threw up his arms and Bonny swung the stream, abruptly changing the minds of several citizens who seemed dead

set on rushing him. He turned it on the crowd beyond and they suddenly forgot their hang-fever and scattered like quail in a hailstorm.

Bonny swung back to the men battering at the jail door then, but they'd already dropped their log and scrambled out of range. He stepped forward to the full length of the hose; he played that black stream around him and cleared a vast semi-circle, and then the jail door swung open and Micajah came lumbering out, bug-eyed with fear, and dove around the side of the building like a cockroach scuttling down a crack.

The mob was after him full cry as the hose nozzle coughed air and the stream died abruptly. Henrietta ran past Bonny crying, "Oh, why did he run? They'll catch him for sure, now!"

She stopped as Marshal Wickerly emerged from the jail, a lean, white-haired man with the wisdom of years in his eyes.

He said, "It was my idea, Miz Gault. I'd left my horse tied to the corral bars, an' he'll be clean down in the valley

before they round up a posse to go after him. There was some doubt in my mind as to his guilt anyway, because Buff Rankin was half drunk when he claimed to have saw your brother robbin' that sluice."

Bonny said, "I guess you can stop frettin' about him, now, Henrietta. I don't reckon he'll be comin' back to Roaring Fork." He surveyed the black mess he'd made in front of the building and shook his head.

"I sure played hob with any chance I might have had of getting the fire chief's job permanent. There was two councilmen in the crowd, and I must have messed up at least half of them pretty red shirts with that mixture of soap and lamp black."

Henrietta came to him and her smile was tender, it was soft. "Never you mind, Bonny," she murmured. "I admire spunk in a man. I'm willing to look up the justice of the peace if you still want to."

And a little bit later she sighed and added, "Anyway, you won't eat near as much as Micajah."

BETWEEN THUMB AND FOREFINGER

DESPITE the golden stream that was pouring out of her canyons in an ever-increasing flood, California suffered a shortage of coined money, specie of any kind, in the marts of trade for many years after '49. It thus became standard practice to take a "pinch" of dust from a miner's poke and regard this "pinch" as the equivalent of an ounce of gold-sixteen dollars, coined value. The cost of the miner's purchases at store or saloon, or his losses at the gaming-tables, were settled on this basis; change due him was paid in whatever legal tender was handy or in merchandise, wet or dry.

It was also standard practice to use thumb and forefinger in taking the "pinch" of dust, and it soon became apparent that a broad thumb and a shovel-shaped forefinger were distinct economic assets. The bigger the digits, the greater the profit for publican or merchant when he balanced the mint total of his "pinches" against the goods he had sold. The canny saloon-keeper or the wily merchant had one sure-fire pre-employment personnel test. Appraising the size and shape of the applicant's thumbs and fingers, he would ask the crucial question: "How much can you raise in a pinch?" If the answer was satisfactory, the applicant got the job.

W. H. HUTCHINSON

William MacLeod Raine recalls some

GUNMEN I HAVE MET

A ZGWM Original Fact Feature

WHEN my brothers and I were little boys we went to a small school in London with the rather grandiose name, The Priory School for Gentlemen. Law and order dominated our surroundings. From this safe and tame environment my father snatched us in 1881 to migrate to America. By some quirk of fortune we settled in Arkansas, where he bought a sawmill, land, and cattle.

The state was then one of the most primitive in the Union. As a result of the Civil War and the ensuing recon-

struction days there was a lot of sporadic lawlessness. The people in our small town were for the most part gracious and friendly, many of them Confederate veterans who had fought well for the lost cause. But the troublous days had left some of them too ready to turn to the pistol for redress of wrongs. The principal of our "college" had killed a man. His brother shot down a preacher for criticizing his wife. Two lawyers in the village had committed homicide. The presiding elder of the Methodist church in our community and one of his pastors emptied revolvers at each other on the courthouse square. Nearly all of those engaged in these encounters were good men with a perverted sense of honor.

Our spread was thirty miles from the nearest town, Newport. While riding one day to that town my father and I came on a piteous scene. A little bare-foot boy about my own age was standing beside a wagon containing two bales of cotton. The dead body of a man lay in the dust. We drew up and dismounted.

The boy sobbed out, "Jim Danks killed my pappy."

It appeared that Danks had lain in wait for his victim and shot him from the brush. We were hardly out of our saddles before the killer stepped from the dogwoods, carrying a long-barreled muzzle-loading rifle.

He patted the boy on the tow head



and said, "Now, buddy, don't you feel bad. Yore paw pestered me till I jest natcherally had to kill him. Tell yore maw I feel right sorry."

Danks rode into Newport with us to give himself up to the sheriff. My impression is that he was never tried.

At this time the James gang was still operating in the region close to us. Frank and Jesse and Coleman Younger had ridden with the terrible guerrilla gangs of Quantrell and Anderson during the Civil War and afterward had continued their careers of lawlessness. I can still remember the great excitement in our town when word came that Jesse James had been shot by Bob Ford.

While I was at Oberlin College ten years later I left during the summer to earn money as a book agent in Minnesota. One of the towns I covered was Stillwater, where the state penitentiary was located. This was fifteen years after the holdup of the Northfield bank the most disastrous raid the James-Younger gang ever made. The three Younger brothers were still in prison. I visited there and saw two of them.

Coleman Younger was a model prisoner and had been put in charge of the library. In the presence of the guard I was allowed to talk with him but not on the subject of his crimes. He was a heavy-set man, bald except for a fringe of gray hair, tight-lipped but quite amiable. I was surprised, as I often was later while talking with men who had passed through desperate adventures, at his mild appearance and gentle manner. He had embraced religion and after his release became a preacher, urging others to take him as an example of how not to live.

More than twenty years after this time I met his cousin Emmett Dalton,

the sole survivor of the notorious bank and train robbers of that name. He and his companions had tried to outdo the James band by robbing two banks at the same time. They had chosen Coffeyville, Kansas, for the scene of their exploit and within five minutes of the time they walked into the banks eight men were dead, including all of the bandits but the youngest, Emmett. Twice wounded, he had reached his horse and mounted when he saw his brother Bob trying to rise from the ground. He wheeled his horse, rode back through a lane of fire, and stooped to reach Bob. A barber, Carey Seaman, poured eighteen buckshot into the boy's back. Emmett survived and after fifteen years was released from prison to marry his boyhood sweetheart.

Time had taken its toll of his recklessness as it had of Cole Younger's when I met him. He was a well-dressed real-estate man in Los Angeles, plump and easy-going, inclined to slow movement. When he spoke his voice had a lazy, gentle drawl. It was hard to visualize in this law-abiding realtor the boy who before he was nineteen years old had ridden on a dozen foolhardy raids.

One of the finest of peace officers was Bill Tilghman. I met him before World War I in Denver while he was exhibiting pictures of and lecturing on the bandits of Oklahoma whom he did so much to wipe out. He was a handsome man, quiet, easy, friendly, one who could tell a good story but minimized his own adventures. Tilghman was one of the greatest of Western peace officers. Like Tom Smith of Abilene, he often arrested bad men without drawing a weapon. Physically he was a fine specimen, strong and agile, with cool, steady eyes that repressed rash impulses in desperadoes. On the frontier

he had a varied career as buffalo hunter, Indian fighter, rancher, state senator, sheriff, and deputy United States marshal.

He was the most renowned of the trio known as "the three guardsmen," the other two being Heck Thomas and Chris Madsen. Oklahoma was at that time a hotbed of outlaws, and these men led the officers who cleaned up the country. They killed and captured the members of the notorious Doolin gang and a score of other outlaws. Tilghman made more arrests of dangerous men than any other officer. On a tip he went to Eureka Springs, arrested Bill Doolin after a desperate fight, and took the outlaw to Guthrie, where Doolin engineered a wholesale prison break.

One of the stories I pried out of him and later checked was his bloodless and silent encounter with the Doolin gang at a ranch near Rock Fort in January, 1895. Though he had hunted the robber band relentlessly he was not at the moment looking for the bandits. With Neal Brown as a deputy he drove to Dunn's ranch on other business. The day was bitterly cold when they reached it. Smoke rose from the chimney and Tilghman walked to the long dugout, leaving his rifle in the wagon. He knocked and got no answer, then pushed open the door and walked in.

At the end of the room a fire of blackjack logs was burning brightly and in front of it sat Dunn. Tilghman moved down the aisle to it between tiers of bunks curtained with quilts. Dunn asked him surlily what he wanted. Bill warmed his hands at the flame and mentioned his reason for coming. At some slight stir behind him the officer turned. His muscles grew rigid, for he had walked into a trap. From the curtained bunks on both sides of

the aisle the barrels of Winchesters and revolvers projected.

Not by the slightest sign did Bill betray his knowledge that he knew he was in deadly peril. He joked about arranging a fight between one of his dogs and a well-known fighter belonging to Doolin. Presently he strolled down the aisle to the door with a casual "Be seeing you" and stepped outside. To Neal Brown he said, "Drive on, not too fast, and don't look round."

Bat Masterson was a friend of Tilghman. Both of them had been officers at Dodge in its wild hell-raising days, Bat as sheriff and Bill as his deputy. When I worked on the old *Denver Republican* at the beginning of the century Bat was a professional gambler in the city. Since I was covering sports I saw more or less of Masterson during the ensuing years. His gun-fighting days were over then, but when in the right mood he liked to talk of the past. He was at the famous Adobe Walls fight on June 27, 1874, when twenty-eight men and a woman drove off about 700 Kiowa, Comanche, and Cheyenne Indians under the lead of the half-breed Quanah Parker.

Once I heard him talk of the philosophy of the trigger finger. The West was full of men courageous and dependable in emergencies, he said, men who had displayed an unflawed nerve under the most critical conditions, but few of them would have survived long as gun fighters. Three factors contributed to a pistoleer's efficiency. The first two were mental, the third required technical skill. A gunman must have pluck, a quality in the frontier West so common that it almost went without saying. The second requisite was a coolness of nerve that would allow one to be deliberate without being flustered

into the agitation of too hurried action. And lastly in a gun fight one had to be very proficient with a weapon, swift in the draw and accurate of aim.

He cited cases to prove his point, the Harrison-Levy duel for one. Harrison was a well-known gambler of unquestioned courage, a notably good shot, the most expert man with a pistol in the Rocky Mountain region. He had a difficulty with Jim Levy, another gambler with no reputation as a gunman. They met on opposite sides of the principal street in Cheyenne. To quote Master-son's words, "Charlie Harrison fairly set his pistol on fire and got five shots at Levy before the latter could draw a bead on him. Levy took his time and looked through the sights of his .45. One shot was enough. Harrison went down in a dying condition. Levy was untouched."

Wyatt Earp was an officer at Dodge at the same time as Tilghman and Master-son. Of all the old-time gun fighters he is the most overrated, due to the fact that his old-age tales of his exploits were accepted as fact by one writer and widely publicized. Many pioneers of the Southwest protested against the book. The leading writers about early days in Arizona—the official historian of the state, McClintock, Professor Frank C. Lockwood of the University of Arizona, Breakenridge, Robinson, Bechdolt—all agree that the Earps were undesirable citizens.

In his *Pioneer Days in Arizona*, a sober and valuable book, Lockwood writes: "On October 26, 1881, Wyatt, Virgil, and Morgan Earp, and Doc Holliday shot and killed Billy Clanton and Tom and Frank McLaury on the street of Tombstone. Though officers of the law, the four killers named above seem to have deliberately brought on

the quarrel for the purpose of getting rid of the Clantons and McLaurys." Earlier in the chapter Lockwood says: "It was not uncommon for a man to be an officer today and a criminal tomorrow. Instance Tom Horn, Milton B. Duffield, Doc Holliday, the Earps, Justice Jim Burnett, Burt Alvord, and even Ringo and Curly Bill."

I have a letter in my files from Billy Breakenridge, a good officer always on the side of the law, in which he says bluntly that the O K Corral killing (the one in which Clanton and the McLaurys were shot down while their hands were in the air) was a cold-blooded murder. After reading carefully the testimony at the trial I had come to the same opinion and said so in an article I wrote for *Liberty* magazine. Wyatt Earp did not like it and protested vigorously. He threatened a lawsuit. I gathered a summary of the evidence, sent it to him, and heard no more from him. He had no case. But echoes of his resentment continued to reach me until his death.

The only time I ever saw Earp was at the Fitzsimmons-Sailor Sharkey fight near the turn of the century at San Francisco. He was the referee. It was a hot night and he came into the ring without a coat but wearing his guns. By request he removed them. Fitzsimmons hammered Sharkey for eight rounds and put him out with his so-called solar-plexus blow. Earp walked over to the prostrate man and raised his arm as the victor. He claimed the blow was a foul. A roar of protest went up all over the ring. Next day the San Francisco papers said the decision was an outrage.

It developed later that Riley Gran-nan, known all over the West as "the

honest gambler," had gone to Fitzsimmons before the fight and told him that if Earp refereed it he would lose, that it was in the bag for the heavy better. Fitz pleaded for a change of referees and was refused. He gave up with a shrug, saying, "I'll knock the bloomin' beggar out anyhow." He did, but lost the decision.

William M. Breakenridge came across the plains to Denver in 1860. In course of time he drifted down to Arizona and during the days when that corner of the territory was filled with desperadoes he became deputy sheriff at Tombstone. He liked to ride out alone to make arrests because he had found out that he could usually talk a wanted man into surrender without even drawing a gun. As a deputy sheriff under Behan he was an active figure in Tombstone at the time Cochise County harbored so many desperate men. He talked Curly Bill, the leader of the rustlers, into helping him collect taxes from the ranchmen who were preying on the stock of others and buying "wet" cattle from raiders bringing stuff across the line. He persuaded John Ringo to come in and give up his guns pending a trial.

Billy's smile was so warm and his manner so disarming that they discounted in advance any appeal to arms. He told me that if one did not count his service with the Colorado troops in '62 against the Indians he had only on one occasion shot at men. At the head of a posse he had been sent out to arrest Zwing Hunt and Billy Grounds, who had killed a young man named Peel while they were holding up the office of the Tombstone Mining Company at Charleston. One of the posse got out of hand before Billy had a chance to talk with the young desperadoes.

Within two minutes of the time the first gun boomed all of his posse were dead or wounded. Breakenridge had no choice. With a sawed-off shotgun he filled Grounds with lead. A bullet from his .45 dropped Hunt. Billy loaded a wagon with the casualties and drove into Tombstone.

He and I were close friends. Billy was a small, plump man with a capacity for warm friendship. We went to Guaymas fishing and drove over the Apache Trail together. Late in his life he visited me both in Colorado and in California. I am glad to recall that it was through me he got his book, *Hell-dorado*, published.

It was Breakenridge who introduced me to Jeff Milton. On that occasion we had lunch at the Old Pueblo Club in Tucson. Jefferson Davis Milton was born in Florida, the son of a governor of that state. He was large, strongly built, with a cheerful disposition and a tireless energy. An immigration inspector in his late years, I saw him occasionally at points along the border.

I noticed that first day at lunch he favored his right arm while eating. The left one was shorter. A bullet from a rifle had plowed it up and interfered with its efficiency for the rest of his life. It was the most annoying wound of half a dozen that outlaws had inflicted on him. I doubt if the West has ever seen a gamer officer than Jeff Milton. He died about a year ago, the last of the old brigade of law gunmen.

He was an express messenger for the Wells-Fargo company on the run between Benson and Guaymas when his arm was disabled. At Fairbanks, Arizona, five men attempted to rob the safe. The order, "Hands up!" came while he was busy unloading packages. Instantly he reached for the saddle gun

leaning against the door. The bandits opened fire and Milton was hit several times in the left arm. He staggered, steadied, and fired. The leader of the outlaws, "Three-fingered Jack" Dunlap, caught the blast from the gun of the intrepid messenger. Milton felt himself fainting and tossed the keys to the safe among the small packages where they could not be found. After a short search the robbers grew panicky and fled. They raced for the hidden gulches of the Chiricahuas, leaving their wounded leader on the trail.

It was a near thing for Jeff. The doctors wanted to amputate his arm but he would not let them. After months of suffering he recovered.

As a youth Jeff had been a Texas Ranger and later chief of police at El Paso. In that border town he had trouble with two of the worst desperadoes Texas has known, John Selman, a bad and vicious killer, and John Wesley Hardin, who claimed he had shot down thirty men before he was twenty-five. A few days after Milton had put Selman in his place word was passed around that Hardin claimed to have hired Milton and his friend Scarborough to kill a man named M'Rose. Jeff would not let that go, though he knew he was dealing with the number-one killer of Texas. He found Hardin in front of Con Ryan's saloon. Men watched from a distance, convinced that this young fool would be dead before his watch had ticked away a minute. Milton said his piece, finishing with the ultimatum that Hardin must admit that he was a liar. The bad man hemmed and hawed. He knew it was a showdown and at last admitted it was only whisky talk.

Not long after this John Selman pumped a bullet into the back of Hardin's

head at the Acme saloon in El Paso. Within a year George Scarborough finished Selman in a duel. Scarborough was killed by members of the Black Jack Ketchum gang.

Burt Alvord's name crops in and out of the historic tales of territorial Arizona, sometimes on the side of the law, more often as a killer, train robber, and all-around desperado. He was a deputy of the famous little sheriff John Slaughter, who served notice on the outlaws of Cochise County, "Get out or get killed." Even while he was backing the bandits who robbed the train at Fairbanks he was a constable at Willcox. With his brother-in-law Stiles and a man named Downing he held up a westbound train at Cochise. I knew him casually, well enough to exchange nods on the street as we passed. He was a swarthy, heavy-set fellow with a dour and sullen look, never a man to be trusted.

After the Cochise train holdup he roosted in the mountains to avoid capture but occasionally slipped into a town after dark. One evening I walked into a Chinese restaurant (all meals twenty-five cents) that faced on Congress Street in Tucson with a back entrance from the old plaza. I sat down at a small table for two. Presently Alvord took the seat opposite me. I must have made some motion to rise.

He said, "Stay put where you're at, bud, and everything will be nice." I stayed. There was no danger unless some officer drifted in and trouble started. Alvord ate rapidly, his glance sweeping the room to make sure he was safe. When he had finished he gave me another order, to do no shouting and not to leave for five minutes. He walked out of the back door and a few

moments later I heard the sound of a galloping horse.

It was soon after the turn of the century that I went into the Tonto Basin as a roving reporter to get the story of the Graham-Tewksbury feud, one of the bloodiest the West has seen. While there I heard a good deal about Burton C. Mossman. He had been superintendent of the Aztec Cattle Company, generally known as the Hashknife outfit, in which position he had been remarkably successful in cleaning out the rustlers nesting on the outskirts of the spread. Governor Murphy had made him Captain of the newly organized Arizona Rangers, most of its members chosen from cowboys and men who had been in Bucky O'Neill's company of rough riders during the Spanish-American war. The story of that small body of rangers, twelve in all, would fill a book. They harried from pillar to post the outlaws who infested the headquarters of the Salt, Black, and White rivers, though two fine young rangers were killed in the process. Mossman himself shot it out with a rufian named Saliveras. He was wounded, but left the fellow dead.

His most dangerous feat was the capture of Augustine Chacon, a twenty-times murderer who had broken prison a few days before the time set for his execution and escaped into Mexico. Chacon was a burly giant, dangerous and suspicious as a wolf, the terror of the border for many years, and I had expected to find his captor a Bill Hickok sort of man. To my surprise he was small and well-groomed, a light-stepping jaunty young fellow with curly hair and a small rose in the buttonhole of his coat. I noticed his cool steel-gray eyes were very steady.

Mossman did not want to talk, but

reporters are a persistent breed. He saw I had the story and only wanted details verified. The ranger chief had gone alone into the mountains and found Alvord, who had been an old running mate of Chacon, and he had persuaded him to act as a decoy on the condition that Alvord got the reward for the capture of the fugitive. From the first Chacon was extremely doubtful of the new recruit, Mossman. The plan was to get the Mexican across the line to rob Colonel Greene's horse pasture. Mossman never spent a more harrowing twenty-four hours. He knew that if it seemed safer both Alvord and Stiles, who was also with them, would swing over to the bandit's side. During the night he did not sleep a wink. At breakfast he got the drop on the outlaw. On his way back across the line Chacon kept saying in Spanish, "I knew I ought to have killed him."

In his earlier days Harry Tracy was an outlaw operating in and around Brown's Hole, Colorado, but I did not come into contact with him until after he broke out of the Oregon penitentiary, June 9, 1902, after killing three guards, wounding a fourth, and shattering the leg of a convict who tried to wrest from him the rifle he carried. With him was another convict, David Merrill. The two headed north toward Washington, living off the country as they traveled by holding up farmers for food and shelter. I know of no flight so amazing as this one. They were shot at a dozen times and more than once trapped, but they broke through to escape. After crossing the Columbia River into Washington, Tracy became suspicious of his companion and shot him in the back. From that time he played a lone hand against a dozen posses moving through a fairly thickly settled

country with the greatest boldness, knowing that his hunters were waiting for him as he advanced into the Puget Sound district.

From 1894 till 1898 I had lived across Lake Washington a few miles from Seattle and I was then back there visiting my parents. I arranged with two metropolitan papers to cover the story and later did a magazine article about it. I doubt if ever a man hunt aroused more excitement. All sorts of rumors were flying. We reporters were out with the posses, of which there were half a dozen, and I daresay our stories contributed to the furor.

The fugitive swung around the north end of the lake toward Bothell. Every road was guarded. His only hope lay in the nature of the country. It was densely wooded and great ferns higher than a man's hips grew closely together. Rain was pouring down, and like the rest of us he sloshed through brush that scattered water like a shower. A posse was walking toward a small settlement, Pontiac, and came on two cabins in a yard overgrown with weeds and with several big black tree stumps. A reporter named Louie B. Sefrit, working for *The Seattle Times*, was present. Three members of the posse crept through a barb-wire fence and started for the house. A fourth man, Raymond by name, stood waiting at the fence.

The barrel of a rifle showed as Tracy lifted his head and fired. At the first flash of the rifle deputy Anderson fell. The second shot struck Raymond. He was dead before his body hit the ground. The outlaw moved slowly away in the drenching rain, firing as he went. Another deputy dropped, badly wounded. Tracy hurried away through the ferns, struck a logging road, and met a horseman whom he relieved of

his mount. This he presently discarded, impressing into service instead a farmer driving a wagon. He forced this man Johnson to drive him to Fremont, a suburb of Seattle. They hitched at the fence of the home of the Van Horns and Tracy invited himself to dinner there. While waiting for it he exchanged clothes with a man named Butterfield to get the man's dry suit.

Though he knew a posse was likely to arrive at any time he stayed at the house for hours and left only when the place was surrounded. He stepped into the yard with Butterfield and Johnson beside him. The guns blazed at him. He killed a policeman, Breece, and mortally wounded game warden Neil Rowley, then broke through the circle and escaped.

During that ten days while he was dodging here and there from one end of Lake Washington to the other he walked into half a dozen houses and made the owners feed him. In every case he gave his name at once, assuming that he was an honored but much feared guest. His effrontery knew no bounds. At one place he called up Sheriff Cudihee over the telephone to sympathize with him over his lack of success. He must have been shot at twenty times. Once he was wounded, but not seriously.

But he was coming to the end of his trail. Eastern Washington, for which he was heading, offers no such cover as the Sound country. He doubled here and there but could not shake off his pursuers. By the time he had reached the rough country south of the Colville Indian reservation he was gaunt and ill-fed as a starved wolf. Hunger, cold, and exposure have tamed more bad men than fear. They sap the physical well-being which bolsters a man's

courage. But Tracy was still dangerously bold.

He was trapped near Creston, in Lincoln County, by five local citizens searching for him. He got behind a rock. As they circled to get a shot at him he made a dash for a wheat field. Their fire converged on him and he went down. But he picked himself up and hobbled on into the field. A shot was heard by the posse. Tracy had killed himself rather than be taken. Few bad men have had so little regard for human life as Harry Tracy.

Like many of the others who joined in the chase I never got a glimpse of him from start to finish, though I must at times have been within a few hundred yards of him and perhaps closer. It was as near as I really wanted to get.

I saw Tom Horn first at the bar of the Denver Press Club. He and a prize-fight promoter appeared to be the guests of Ed. Charlton, a police reporter. Tom had been drinking and was more than half-seas over. Later in the day he became helplessly drunk and was frisked of \$200 in the back room of a saloon. Next day the papers told the story, adding that Horn knew who had done it and intended to see the men about it. Understand, I am throwing no stones when I mention that Charlton, with whom I had played poker fifty times, left that day for San Francisco and did not return to Denver during Horn's life. He became the water-front reporter of the *Chronicle* and was, I believe, on that newspaper until his death.

Of all the gunmen of the West none with the exception of Billy the Kid has been more discussed than Tom Horn. The psychology of a bad man is hard

to understand, particularly so in the case of Horn because he was a staunch friend, generous, kindly, full of good stories and laughter. In spite of which he was hanged November 20, 1903, for the cold-blooded murder of a fifteen-year-old boy, Willie Nickell, whom the murderer probably mistook for his father since he was wearing Kels Nickell's hat and coat. The evidence against him, wholly circumstantial except for his drunken confession, was not too strong, but he was known to be a professional killer for pay and in the public mind he was the instrument of big cattlemen who were thought to have constituted themselves judge, jury, and executioner of small fry guilty of rustling.

Tom Horn had a distinguished record as a scout. He served with credit as head packer in Cuba during the Spanish-American war. At one time he was the champion roper of the country. After his arrest I dropped into the office of the United States marshal of Arizona. A young fellow there told me he would give half of all he had to free Tom. In Cuba he and another man had been lying on some brush shaking with fever. Horn passed with his mule train and asked them where they lived. When they told him Arizona, he took charge of them, put them in his tent, doctored and fed them until they were well. On one occasion he saw a poorly fed, poverty-stricken family of Russian children just arrived at Greeley, Colorado. Tom took them to a restaurant, fed them, bought them shoes, and returned them to their parents. Years later at Newcastle, Wyoming, a newspaper editor showed me the recommendations General Miles and General Lawton had written for Tom after the surrender of Geronimo. Both praised

him highly. Another written by General Wilcox commended his courage in rescuing Sergeant Murray under fire and his coolness and skill in extricating troops from a dangerous situation.

Yet he is known to have shot down at least four men in cold blood for money. Horn and the men who employed him did not realize that times had changed. Ten years earlier the big cattlemen, with fifty Texan warriors had gone into this same country with the open avowal that they intended to rub out a large number of rustlers and their supporters. All of them had escaped punishment. Horn himself had killed four men, Lewis, Powell, Dart, and Rash, for stealing stock, and still rode the hills a free man, though he was watched with wary suspicion. Anger against him had been boiling up. Before the first witness had taken the stand at his trial for the killing of Willie Nickell the stock detective was doomed. The pressure of public opinion was overwhelming. After a trial lasting two weeks the jury brought in a verdict of guilty. I was present only during two sessions. One could not help having a certain admiration for the man's cool nerve.

That nerve never deserted him. A newspaper friend of mine, John C. Thompson, was at the execution. He says that Horn was the most composed man there. During the long months since his arrest he had been faithful to the men who had employed him, though there was a chance he might escape the supreme penalty if he talked. He went to his death without implicating them. The manner of his going was typical of the man. A friend of his, T. Joe Cahill, was on the platform. After the black cap had been put over his head and no sound could be

heard but that of the running water which in a few moments would release the trap, Horn's steady voice came from under the hood.

"Joe, they tell me you're married now. I hope you are doing well. Treat her right."

The expression "bad man" was often used to mean no condemnation—only that the one referred to was dangerous with a gun. Tom Smith of Abilene and Bill Tilghman of Cromwell were of this type, brave men and fine citizens who gave their lives to support the law. Another class was that of men bad at heart, with no respect for human life, enemies to society who sometimes seemed to enjoy killing others. Sam Brown of Virginia City was one of these, as were John Selman of El Paso and Harry Tracy and Billy the Kid. Their guns were always smoking. Between these two was a third group. Often those of this type became law officers, chosen because they were dead shots, had nerve, and might be expected to curb other desperadoes. Officers of this sort carried on private vendettas and used their office to satisfy personal grudges. Of this division may be included Wild Bill Hickok, Wyatt Earp, and Ben Thompson.

In the fight for law and order on the frontier hundreds of brave marshals and sheriffs have passed out in smoke. Most of them never became famous and are not remembered. They did not consider themselves heroes and many of them were not, but they did follow the plain line of duty no matter where it led them. It seems a pity to choose as heroes such men as Jesse James and Billy the Kid by distorting the truth and putting them into books and movies with the implication that they were gallant Robin Hoods, while better men are forgotten.

THE STEADFAST

By Wayne D. Overholser



WHEN disguised by the darkness of a prairie night, Gunlock seemed a pleasant place with its one wide street and the pools of yellow light spilling out across the dust from Clem York's hotel and saloon. But the sunrise drew away the disguise. Then Gunlock could be seen for what it was, a huddle of buildings dropped here among the empty miles, an evil, almost deserted town with broken hitch rails and walks that had more splint-ered boards than sound ones, with cob-webbed windows and doors that hung askew from bent hinges.

Each morning Dave Lowrie viewed Gunlock with distaste as he walked from his house at the east end of town to his livery stable. He always had the weird feeling he was looking at something that should have been a corpse but stubbornly refused to become one.

There was something painful about seeing Gunlock this way, for he had been here when it was a brawling trail town; he had seen the settlers come filled with hope and leave with no hope at all, humbled by drouth and hard times. He had seen his father die here in front of Clem York's hotel, shot in the back by parties unknown, or so the coroner's jury had said.

Almost every morning Dave met Mar-shal Arno Slade on the street, a toothpick

gripped between his strong white teeth, the sun gleaming on his large gold star. The meeting had become an anticipated drama laden with dynamite that never exploded.

This morning Slade was standing in his usual position, the slanted sunlight cutting sharply across his bold face. Dave glanced at the gold star, thinking of his father, Ben Lowrie, who had been Gunlock's marshal through the boom years when it had been a tough town. A small star with doubtful silver plating had been good enough for him.

Dave's gray eyes lifted to the marshal's cynical black ones and held there. There was a gun on Dave's hip, the same .44 his father had worn for so many years. Now Dave's hand dropped to worn butt as it always did when he met Slade, for the man was unpredictable and dangerous.

Slade said, "Lowrie."

Dave stopped, saying nothing. He suspected, as everyone in Gunlock suspected, that Arno Slade had killed his father. From the day Ben Lowrie had died, Dave had known that the time would come when he would kill Slade, but he had waited until he had proof of the man's guilt. Now, meeting the marshal's cool malicious stare, he wondered if his two years of waiting had been a mistake. There were those in Gunlock who said it was.

"A man came through last night," Slade said. "He wanted a fresh horse."

Dave nodded, a prickle running down his spine. Perhaps Slade had grown tired of the waiting.

"You wouldn't let him have one," Slade pressed. "Why?"

"He didn't have any money."

"He offered to trade."

Dave shrugged. "His animal was dead on his feet."

Slade jerked the toothpick from his mouth. "Don't be such a damned fool, Lowrie. We all make our living the same way. This fellow was headed for the strip the same as a hundred other men have. He needed that horse."

"Why didn't you let him have one?"

"I did. I've got his horse in my barn now. Come over and get him and fetch me one of yours. I ain't no horse trader. You are. You can doctor him up and trade him off to the next man who comes through."

"If you traded, you're a horse trader," Dave said evenly. "That don't mean I'm taking him off your hands."

"You come and get him," Slade said flatly. "Fetch me that black gelding of yours."

"You giving me orders?" Dave asked.

"That's exactly what I'm doing."

"Then you can go to hell. I'm not Clem York or Fred Dunham."

Dave started toward his livery. Slade said, "Lowrie."

Dave swung back. "Now what?"

"Clem does a good business with his hotel and saloon. Fred ain't doing so bad in his store, neither. You know why?"

"I know all right, but I'm satisfied."

"You won't be long if you don't accommodate the boys who come through. There won't be nothing left of Gunlock, neither. They talk when they get together in the strip. They know they can lay over here. Get a drink and a meal. A room if they want it. If they don't have the dinero on 'em, they get it and send it back. You could have asked a hundred dollars' boot and you'd have had it in a week."

"I don't do business that way," Dave said, and started for his livery again.

"Damn you, Lowrie," Slade said darkly. "You won't stay here long if Judge Patterson decides to move you out."

Dave went on, and when he reached the archway of his stable, he looked back and saw that Slade had disappeared. Judge Patterson was probably having his breakfast and listening to Slade's angry report.

Dave picked up a fork and began cleaning out the stalls. Judge Patterson had controlled Gunlock from the day Arno Slade had pinned on his gold-plated star. That was one of the things which kept Dave from forcing the issue with Slade. Killing him would actually settle nothing unless Patterson was dealt with at the same time, and that was a difficult matter. The judge ran the bank, a soft-spoken man who was well liked. Even Annie Wallen, one of the first settlers, couldn't believe that Patterson had any part in making Gunlock the outlaw haven it had become.

Dave was finishing the last stall when June Wallen came down the runway to him. She said, "Grandma wants you, Dave."

Startled, Dave wheeled, wanting to shout at her never to sneak up on him again. He didn't. Nobody shouted at June Wallen. She was the one lovely thing in an ugly town. At eighteen she was a mature woman who was repelled by the wickedness around her and withdrew from it, held here only because of her loyalty to her grandmother.

Every hardcase who drifted through Gunlock and saw June stopped long enough to make love to her. Arno Slade asked her to marry him on the average of once a week, and even Judge Patterson in his mild-mannered way had let her know she could have him the minute she said the word. She treated them all alike, holding them off with cool disdain, although sometimes she looked at Dave in a way that made him

think she had a higher regard for him than for the others.

Now, looking at her slim figure in a bright print dress, her soft-lipped pliant mouth, her brown hair pinned in a high crown on her head, he thought that this girl was at least partly responsible for his remaining in Gunlock.

He said, "You're as pretty as the morning, June. Makes me feel good just to look at you."

"Grandma wants to see you," June said sharply. "Come on."

"I don't know that I'm gonna run every time—"

"Dave, will you come on! She's in a tizzy."

"I guess there's nothing that needs doing around here that can't wait." He leaned the fork against the wall and walked down the runway beside her. "Ain't Annie in a tizzy most of the time?"

"She isn't well, Dave," June said gravely. "She wants to see things changed before she dies."

"What will you do when she dies?"

"Get out of here," the girl said dully. "Go to Denver, I guess."

They walked in silence then, Dave thinking about what June had said. Towns died when their people left, and nothing remained but empty buildings for spiders and mice, empty buildings with their windows gone. The wind would howl around the eaves and dust would drift through the open doorways. Then the buildings would disappear and grass would grow in the street, hiding the scar the town had once laid upon the face of the prairie. That would be Gunlock's fate, a thought that brought a vague disturbance to Dave.

Annie Wallen sat in her rocking chair on the porch. When Dave and

June came up, she rapped her cane on the railing, calling, "Is that the fastest you can move, Dave Lowrie?"

He dropped down on the porch and leaned against a post. "I'll do anything for you, Annie, except run." He winked at June. "I'll even marry your granddaughter."

Blushing, the girl glanced at her grandmother. Annie motioned to the door.

"Go get them dishes done. What's the matter with you? You haven't got time to stand around and listen to this blatherskite's soft talk."

June fled, her cheeks scarlet. Dave said hotly, "Someday I'm going to tell June your bite ain't as bad as your bark. You keep her scared half to death."

"Scared? Ha! You don't know June. And you don't need to josh about marrying her unless you mean it."

Dave had lifted tobacco and paper from his pocket. Now he looked at the old woman, fingers clutching the makings, his eyes searching her wrinkled face.

He said, "Annie, you're as crusty as hell, but you wouldn't say that unless I had a chance with June, would you?"

"Why don't you ask her? I'd like to see your face when you do. Yes sir, I would." She tapped her cane on the railing again. "Well, I didn't call you over here to gab about June's love affairs. When are you going to clean this town up?"

Dave rolled his smoke then, not looking at her. She was old and she was sick, and it was understandable that, as June had said, she wanted to see things changed. Still, she had no right to prod him into something before he had the proof he needed.

Firing his cigarette, he tossed the

match into the yard. He said, "You ain't one to beat around the bush, Annie. Speak your piece."

She scowled at him, her cane tapping steadily on the railing. Her white hair was pulled into a tight knot on the back of her head. Now she lifted a hand to touch a brown mole on her cheek. Looking at her, Dave thought of something he had not thought of before. In a way she was like Gunlock; she simply refused to die.

"I will," Annie said. "For two years now you and Arno Slade have been walking around on your tiptoes like a couple of dogs wanting to tear into each other and lacking the guts to do it. You know he shot your pappy. What's the matter with you?"

"It ain't just a matter of guts," he said irritably. "Slade's fronting for somebody else."

"Who?"

"Patterson."

"Hogwash. You don't know that." She waved her cane at him. "Now look here, Dave Lowrie. We made this town, me and your pappy and Jake Bendix and some more. Come in covered wagons from The Arkansas. Followed the Santa Fe Trail till we left the river. Fought Comanches once. I lost my son in that ruckus. I ain't crying over him. I never did and I never will. It's part of the price he paid for wanting to have a hand in making a new country. It might have been me or your pappy or Jake."

She looked northward across the low, rolling hills, a mottled green with the sun making alternate patches of light and shadow upon them.

"It was a purty sight when we got here. A mighty purty sight. Right off we saw this was the place to build our town. We knew we could raise wheat

as good as they could in Kansas, but likewise we knew we'd have to fight cattlemen who claimed this range. We did, too. We knew there'd be times when we'd go hungry. There'd be sickness and we didn't have no doctor. Some of us would die. Your ma was one of them. Typhoid. So did June's mother. Scarlet fever. But that was part of the price, too. We done the best we could, Dave, and we made a town."

She brought her eyes to him and she was very old and tired. "Ben died for the same thing the rest of them did. Right from the first he was cut out to be a lawman same as I was cut out to be the cook in the hotel. Same as Jake Bendix had ink in his veins and started the *Herald*. Well, Dave, we had cattle going up the trail right here beside Gunlock. Then the settlers came in, folks like we was who wanted to raise wheat. They knew they could because we had, but they didn't have the kind of backbones we did and they fizzled out."

She pounded her cane on the railing. "Damn it, Dave, can't you see what this town was made of? Our blood. Our sweat and our hopes. Sure there was bad years, but we stayed and most of us lived. Now we've had rain again and the settlers'll come back. If Gunlock's a decent town, they'll trade here. If Arno Slade goes on running it for outlaws, it'll die."

Dave's cigarette had gone cold in his mouth. Annie Wallen had told him nothing new, but he had learned something just sitting here and watching her. Her spirit had kept her alive, the same spirit that had kept Gunlock from going back to the prairies. That spirit was the difference between those who had come and failed, and those

who had made the town in the first place and stayed.

He said, "As long as Patterson—"

"Oh, shut up," she said testily. "Maybe you're right about him, but it's Slade that's given this place the name it's got. Who's to blame for letting him stay? You! That's who. Now don't get your mad up. Ben told me a dozen times you had every quality a lawman needed, but what have you done? You've been satisfied to run a little old livery stable, a job anybody could do who can fork hay into a manger and manure out of a stall. Ben Lowrie wouldn't have been satisfied with that. He was the same caliber man as Bat Masterson and the rest who've kept the lid on out here. There ought to be a monument to Ben. The *best* kind he could have would be a Gunlock that'll be here a hundred years from now."

Dave rose and tossed his half-smoked cigarette into the yard. He had felt this. Everything Annie had said. It had been bottled up inside him, a smoldering fire he had tried to smother. Now it blazed up, and then died down, for he was remembering things his father had said when he'd taught him the use of a gun, about the responsibilities a man faced when he became deadly fast with a gun.

"Well, Dave," Annie threw at him. "Are you going to run Slade out of town?"

"He wouldn't run," Dave said somberly, "and I can't pull a gun on him until I know he killed Dad."

She snorted. "You think Slade's going to come around and tell you he shot Ben?"

"Dad was shot in the back," Dave said dully. "No one saw him do it."

"I know," Annie said in a milder

tone. "It's made me crazy, I guess, just sitting here and watching Slade and knowing how it's going to be when the settlers come in again. We'll see wheat raised all over this country. There'll be a town. It just won't be Gunlock."

Dave wiped a hand across his face, puzzled by this sudden change in her. It wasn't like Annie Wallen to back up after she had started something.

"I guess it won't," he said, and stepped down from the porch.

She drew her shawl more tightly around her shoulders, tears running down her cheeks. "Dave," she said, "will you run over to Jake's office and fetch me the paper? It ought to be off the press by now."

In all the years he had known Annie Wallen, he had never seen her cry. He looked away, embarrassed. It would have been all right to have seen tears on any woman's face but Annie's.

He said, "I'll see," and walked rapidly away.

She was a little crazy, Dave told himself as he moved along the street to Jake Bendix's print shop. Jake was crazy, too. Ben had been the same when he was alive. They were hipped about this town they'd made. They'd had their dreams, but now, after twenty years, their dreams had still remained only dreams.

Then resentment was in Dave, a bitter resentment that cut like acid in his blood stream. Annie had said he was to blame for Slade's giving Gunlock the name it had. That wasn't true and it wasn't right for Annie to say it. He had been only twenty-one when his father had been killed, a kid barely old enough to vote. The older men were to blame men like Clem York and Fred Dunham, who had bowed before Judge Patterson's will.

There was something else, too, and as Dave thought about it, his resentment grew, for he knew he could do nothing more than he had. Ben Lowrie had been no part of a braggart. Quiet, conscientious, colorless, a brave man who did his job as he saw it. To Dave he had been the greatest man in the world. Often, as dusk flowed across the prairie, the two of them had sat smoking on the front porch and talked. It had been mostly about one basic conflict in life, the battle between right and wrong. As Ben had seen it, the struggle between law and lawlessness was part of that basic conflict, but he had continually sounded one warning note.

"Some men who are fast with a gun get the notion they're God," Ben had said. "Whenever a man, and it don't make no difference whether he's got a star on his shirt or not, gets the notion that he's got the right to take his gun and settle with another man on a personal basis, he's wrong, just plumb wrong."

That had been back of Dave's waiting. When the settlement came with Arno Slade, it must come with Judge Patterson, too, but he was determined it would not be on the issue of personal vengeance.

Dave walked slowly, wondering what Ben would have done if he were alive and making the decision. They were interwoven into one pattern, his father's death and Gunlock's becoming an outlaw haven. In some way, although Dave had never been sure how, Judge Patterson was making money out of the thing Arno Slade had done to Gunlock. That was the reason Ben Lowrie had died. Still, it was only Dave's explanation, and if he set out to punish Slade and Patterson without proof, he

would be playing God and Ben would have said it was wrong.

Dave was picking his way along the splintered walk in front of Fred Dunham's store when he heard the first yell of pain. It made only a faint impression on his consciousness, so deeply was he buried in his thoughts, but the second brought him to a stop. He stood motionless for an instant, not sure where the sound came from then decided it must have originated in Jake Bendix's print shop. He ran past the vacant building that stood beside Dunham's store and turned into Bendix's place.

He saw at once he had guessed right. Arno Slade and Judge Patterson were standing at Bendix's desk. The old editor was slumped over in his swivel chair, blood from a cut streaming down his face.

As Dave came to a flat-footed stop, Slade raised his fist and struck the old man, shouting, "If it wasn't Lowrie's idea, whose was it?"

Patterson, a small man beside Slade, tugged at the marshal's coat tail, crying, "That's enough, Arno. That's enough".

"He'll talk," Slade raged. "I tell you he'll talk," and raised his fist again.

"Don't do it," Dave called.

Slade and Patterson wheeled away from the desk. Slade must have recognized Dave's voice, for he pulled gun as he turned. Dave had no choice; no time to think about what he should do. His response was the natural reaction that a man makes when he is prompted by the instinct of self-preservation, but it was the training that Ben Lowrie had given him, not instinct, that saved his life.

Dave drew his gun and fired while Slade was still turning toward him and lifting gun from leather. Slade lurched

with the impact of the slug, his own shot going wide. He took one staggering step and fell. Patterson let out a strange cry that sounded like the bleat of a sheep, yanked a gun out from under his coat, and went down under Dave's second bullet.

Bendix rose, holding a handkerchief to his battered face. He said, "You use a gun just like Ben did. Annie said it would be that way."

Dave stared at the dead men, suddenly cold and trembling a little. He looked at the smoking gun in his hand and then at the dead men again, not understanding this or what Annie Wallen had to do with it.

Picking up a paper from his desk, Bendix brought it to Dave. Men poured in from the street, Clem York and Fred Dunham and some more, gaping at Dave and the two bodies and throwing questions at Bendix.

Dave glanced at the newspaper, still not understanding. In the center of the front page was a black box holding the words, *Arno Slade has twenty-four hours to live unless he leaves town.*

"They pulled on Dave," Bendix was saying. "He shot both of them in self-defense."

"I didn't think the boy was that fast," Clem York said, as if this was beyond belief. "You were right about him, Jake."

"Dave, you didn't know," Bendix said, "but Annie and me wanted you to have the star after Ben was killed. Patterson held out for Slade, saying you was too young." He motioned toward the men who had come in. "They agreed with Patterson."

"And lived to regret it," Fred Dunham said.

Dave jabbed a long finger at the newspaper. "What is this?"

"Annie's notion," Bendix said. "We were pretty sure Slade was ready to bust. He's been scared for two years that you'd jump him. He didn't have the guts to jump you, and another back-shooting job would have been one too many. Annie said she'd get you over here just about the time Slade always came in for his paper. Naturally Slade jumped to the conclusion you were warning him to get out, and when he saw you, he blew up like we figured he would." Bendix's bruised lips shaped a grin. "We timed it just right, looks like."

Suddenly Dave was aware that he still held his gun. He dropped it into his holster, saying, "Patterson didn't have to—"

"Yes, he had to make his try," Bendix cut in. "He sank or swam with Slade. You see, he was buying stolen money from the boys who came through here, giving them fifty cents on the dollar, and then sending it to California where it could safely be put into circulation. I knew about it, but there wasn't anything I could do with Slade packing the star. Now you'd better take that paper over to Annie."

As Dave turned, Clem York said, "You'll take the marshal's job, won't you, Dave?"

"I'll take it," Dave said, and walked back to Annie Wallen's house.

She was still sitting in her rocking chair when Dave came up and handed her the newspaper. He said, "It's finished. Patterson, too."

"Well then, I was wrong about him."

She folded the paper, her eyes fixed on his face. "Dave, I made you risk your life. I would have taken your place if I could, but it had to be you. All of us have some talents, and you were the only one who had the right talent for this job. If you had died, I would never have forgiven myself, but you were Ben's son. I knew you wouldn't."

He dropped a hand to the butt of his .44, thinking of the things his father had told him about the responsibilities a man had who was fast with a gun. Annie Wallen and Jake Bendix might have been wrong, but the job was done. Tomorrow was another day and Gunlock would be a different town, but the important thing was that he had not done something for which he need be ashamed.

"We made Gunlock," Annie was saying, "but it's up to the new generation to keep it going." She motioned to the door. "June's making a cake. Go tell her she's got no call to hate Gunlock. It'll be a good town for her to raise her children—hers and yours."

She heard his steps fade as he walked through the house. She was still sitting there, her eyes on the low hills when a settler's wagon appeared on the horizon.

"The first," she said softly. "They'll come, hundreds of them. That one's like the first robin in the spring. Ben Lowrie has got his monument, the kind he'd like."



A MISERLY OLD RANCHER with a hidden hoard, a pretty and neglected young wife, and a lovestruck hired hand—explosive ingredients for a grim rangeland drama. A ZGWM original novelette.



LONG WINTER

By Harry Sinclair Drago

IT WAS almost noon when Chad Holderness drove into the ranch yard and pulled up his team between the woodpile and the kitchen door. He had been over to the hot springs for water; the ranch well had been frozen solid for weeks. Steam still rose from the barrel that stood on the floor of the flat-bed wagon. He had learned that by wasting no time on the return trip he could reach the house before the water froze.

Lucy Goss, bundled up in a sheepskin-lined coat many sizes too large for her, stepped out of the kitchen door and waved to him.

"It's not so cold," she said, the wind whipping at her yellow hair.

"Cold enough!" he called back. "If you'll hand up the buckets, Lucy, we'll get this water into the kitchen."

She knew exactly what to do and for ten minutes they worked without exchanging a word. But Chad's eyes followed her as she made the hurried trips from the wagon to the miserable shack that Balaam Goss had built for himself when he had startled this corner of Nevada by settling in these badlands and audaciously announcing that he was going to develop the

sage-brush flats in to a cow ranch. After marrying Lucy, he had added a room, just a shell, covered side and roof with tar paper. Balaam never wasted any money on anything, or anyone, himself included.

Balaam was old enough now to be referred to as "old Balaam"; Lucy was only twenty-two or three. Chad wasn't sure about it. It didn't matter; all he knew was that she was young and so was he. Whenever he thought about her—and he thought about little else—his thinking always had that angle.

It wasn't only that Lucy was young; there was something mysterious and alluring about her. Her father, Tony Szabo, was an undersized, black-browed Hungarian. From him Lucy got her high, Magyar cheekbones and her provocative, faintly-slanted eyes. It was her Polish mother, however, whom she greatly favored. She had the wide hips, deep-bosomed body, and the coloring and flawless skin so common in Polish women.

Chad had been aware of her for only the past ten months, but over the years he had often seen her around White Pine, a strange figure clad in dirty overalls and a denim jumper, perched on the seat of the Szabo milk cart or delivering a wagonload of manure for someone's garden. It followed as a matter of course that she had become the butt of a great amount of barroom levity. Eventually, the wives of certain leading citizens had descended on Tony Szabo at his dairy on the outskirts of town, and informed him that wrestling five-gallon milk cans, delivering manure, or gathering swill and slops for his pigs was not a young woman's work. He was ordered to desist forthwith and at once.

Tony could not understand why they

were so exercised, but he understood their wrathful indignation perfectly and reluctantly replaced Lucy with a hired man. White Pine's female vigilantes were not done with him, however. Foreigners could usually be assimilated, but a quarter of a century in Nevada had not made a mark on Tony Szabo. The filth and squalor in which he and his numerous progeny lived with the cows, pigs, geese, and chickens was a menace to the health of the community, it was asserted. Some even suggested that Lucy be taken away from him and placed in an institution. But Balaam Goss, his eyesight failing even then, had come along and married her, and the feminine dogooders had lost interest in the Szabos, for marriage, whatever its terms, was regarded as the great cure-all that, for better or for worse, eventually solved a young woman's problems.

Lucy had not been consulted about marrying Balaam Goss; Balaam and her father had come to terms regarding her, and hoping to escape from her drudgery, she had consented to the arrangement.

"Sold her—same as he'd sell a horse or a cow!" Chad often told himself.

It wasn't quite as bad as that. Not quite. But presently Tony Szabo had found himself out of debt for the first time in twenty-five years. And Balaam, bent on proving to himself that he had struck no mean bargain, saw Lucy emerge radiant and beautiful from her ugly cocoon in the new raiment and cheap finery he provided. But only briefly; when he had seen enough to convince himself that he had made no mistake, the purse strings closed and he had brought her out to this forlorn ranch and miserable shack in the badlands, with no neighbor nearer than

the Hendy boys, eighteen miles down Dry Creek—so named because the little spring-fed stream dwindled to a mere trickle in mid-summer.

Five years, more or less, had passed since Balaam had brought her home. From little things Lucy had said when she and Holderness were alone, he knew that it had not taken her long to realize that she had only exchanged one master for another, with the new one a more unfeeling tyrant than the old. Tony Szabo and his wife were dead. It was a waste of time to hate the dead; but Balaam Goss was very much alive, and Chad Holderness hated him with every breath he drew.

"That's the last of it," Chad said as he handed down a half-filled bucket. "While I was on the creek, I saw Balaam riding south across the flats."

"He went down to get a sack of flour from Pete Hendy."

"I figured it was something of the sort." Chad's tone was sharp and bitter. "He couldn't take the team and drive you into town in the morning; he might have to buy you a new dress or a trinket of some sort. In the ten months I been here, you ain't been away from the ranch once, Lucy."

She pulled her eyes away and said, "It would be a long, cold trip to White Pine." She always said something to turn him back whenever he spoke out against Balaam. "Dinner will be on the table by the time you put up the team. He won't be back till evening."

Chad grunted scornfully. A free meal at the Hendys! He wouldn't miss that—"I'll put up the team. You get inside; it's too cold for you out here."

He drove down to the barn and cared for the horses. His glance fell on the empty stall in which Balaam kept his big piebald mare, the only horse he

ventured to ride since his sight had failed completely a summer ago.

"That mare's a wise one, but she'll make a mistake some day," he muttered. "It's asking too much of a horse to pack a blind man around this broken country. She'll pitch him over the rim of some canyon and that'll be the end of him—and the sooner the better!"

Chad had been waiting all winter for something of that sort to happen. This was his first open acknowledgement of it. He was convinced that Balaam's blindness was an affliction that Providence had put on the man for his miserly meanness. But Balaam had an iron will; Chad couldn't deny him that. Total blindness had not stopped him; he had continued to ride his scattered range, run errands down the creek, and make occasional trips to White Pine as he always had, depending on the old mare to do his seeing and fetch him safely home.

It was cold in the barn. The horses turned their heads and eyed Chad with interest as he pulled down some hay from the loft. Balaam's niggardliness extended even to them and they never got enough to eat.

"What the hell!" he growled, giving each an extra forkful.

Where this thing that was eating into him and tearing him apart was going to end, he didn't know. More than once during the long winter he had been at the point of asking for his time and leaving the ranch. But that meant cutting himself off from Lucy, and he wasn't up to it. He knew he had made his mistake in not leaving when the fall work was done, when Balaam had turned off the rest of his crew. If he had gone then, he could have caught on somewhere and perhaps had forgotten all about Lucy in time.

He was deceiving himself, for he had not been his own man even then; he had seduced her, and that had been his undoing. As long as there had been work to do that took him away from the house for a day or two at a time, he had been able to fight off this madness, even to denying that he loved her and that she was in love with him. If he was no better than the average run of men, he at least had scruples against reaching out for another man's wife. He had never reached out for Lucy; it was the long winter, living under the same roof with her and Balaam, the three of them cut off from the rest of the world, that had forced his hand and brought things to where they were now.

"It might have been different if he had shown her a little consideration once in a while," Chad thought aloud as he stood at the frosted barn window, peering at the house. "He figures he bought her and she's his to treat as he pleases."

He knew it was too late to think of leaving now. He shook his head over the thought. "It wouldn't do any good. I'd come back if it was only to kill him."

Dinner was on the table when he stepped into the kitchen. He washed his hands and ran a comb through his hair before he sat down. Lucy was busy at the stove, unaware of his critical regard. Physically, the life her father and Balaam had led her had not coarsened her nor left any marks on her young body, but there was something in her eyes, beaten, frustrated, that no longer completely left them even when she smiled.

She brought the coffeepot to the table and sat down. The two of them ate without speaking until the silence grew so oppressive that the ticking of the

clock was like the measured beating of a hammer. Finally, Chad threw down his knife and fork, his face tense and rocky.

"Sitting here like a couple sticks will never get us anywhere." His voice was rough with feeling. "We got to do something, Lucy. Things can't go on like this much longer. I wonder sometimes how I've been able to keep my hands off him, treating you the way he does. He'll go too far one of these days!"

"No!" she cried, her hand flashing to her throat as she straightened up in her chair. "Don't you ever do anything to him! He's blind!"

He laughed thinly. "You don't have to be afraid, Lucy. I know he's blind. That's why I'm here; there's things he can't do on the ranch, or he wouldn't have kept me on, even at winter wages. If he thought you could do them, he'd give me my time in a minute. When he had his sight, he didn't have to depend on anyone. It's different now. That's why he hates me and why he hates you—Are you going to go on like this for the rest of your life?"

She shook her head slowly. It was neither yes nor no; just bewilderment.

"What else can I do? He's my husband."

"You can leave him—divorce him. You've got grounds for it. Listen, Lucy—do you want *me* to go?"

She put down her fork with a noisy clatter and stared at him aghast. "No—no—a thousand times no! How can you even suggest it? You're all I've got that means anything to me. If you went, I couldn't stand it."

He reached across the table and caught her hands. "We could leave together—today—now!" He saw the blood drain away from her cheeks.

"No," she said, "we're not going to

begin by running away. If we got off to that sort of a start it wouldn't work out. It never does."

"Maybe there's a better way," he conceded pessimistically. He released her hands and sat hunched over, lost in thought for several moments. And then, "Whenever I say anything about your divorcing him, you shut me up. Haven't you ever thought about it, Lucy?"

She shook her head wearily. "I wouldn't know how to go about it. If I told him I was going to do anything like that, he'd find a way to stop me. I'd need money, and I haven't any."

"What about Balaam's money? Part of it's yours. That's what the law says. I bet he's well fixed. He never spends a cent. The big outfits laugh at him and his little spread, but he's been ranging more cattle every year and with prices sky-high, he's been doing all right. How much has he got put away, Lucy? Fifteen, twenty thousand dollars?"

She drew back, suddenly suspicious of his questions. "Why talk about it, Chad? It's Balaam's money—Your dinner's getting cold. Why don't you eat? I baked those noodles especially for you."

"All right," he muttered.

Baked noodles, with a crust of bread crumbs fried in bacon grease, had become one of his favorite dishes. It never appeared on the table when Balaam was home. He ate only a few mouthfuls, however, before he pushed his plate aside.

"Lucy—he has to get you to count his money. That's one thing he can't do for himself. You know how much he's got and where it's hid. He wouldn't trust a bank. It's right here in this house, ain't it?"

His insistence sent a sharp wave of terror through her. She tried to read his eyes only to find them blank and vacant.

"You haven't any right to ask me such things," she said over her shoulder as she left the table and walked to the window, her voice tense and alarmed. Her woolen dress had been made over so many times that it was several sizes too small for her, and as she stood there with her back to him, her sudden agitation was so pronounced that beneath the tight bodice, her breast rose and fell as though trying to escape its confinement.

"Balaam's money can't mean anything to you." Her tone suggested that she was accusing him of having designs on it. "Why are you so interested?"

It drew a bitter, mirthless laugh from Holderness. "I get you. You think I'm itching to get my fingers on it. You're crazy if you do. I'm only thinking about you. Where would it leave you if something happened to him? Could you put your hands on the money?"

She swung around on him excitedly, her eyes accusing. "What do you mean—if something happened to him?"

"If he—took sick or met with an accident."

"I—I hope that's what you meant," she got out with an effort, her voice unsteady. "When the two of you are out on the range together, it would be so easy for you to do something to him and make it look like an accident. If you ever try it, Chad, I warn you it'll be the end of everything between us. I couldn't live with anything like that on my mind. It would always be there to haunt us."

"Don't worry," Holderness told her, taking it lightly. "I'll never make any

fool play like that. If he breaks his neck one of these days, just don't blame me. Telling him to be careful is a waste of breath."

"I know," she murmured soberly. "He'll do as he pleases. If he gets into trouble on his own account, that's different; we won't have it on our minds."

He let it pass without comment and gave his attention to his dinner. Lucy turned back to the window to gaze across the barren, snow-covered buttes but too engrossed with her thoughts to be aware of the lonely, tortured landscape.

After taking his time over his coffee, Holderness broke his long silence to remark with biting sarcasm, "It's great, ain't it—the two of us getting all worked up about what happens to him! I'd like nothing better than to find him at the bottom of a canyon some morning with every bone busted!"

He saw Lucy shudder.

"You don't like to have me say things like that, do you?"

"Please, Chad!" she implored. "It's after one o'clock. You have to ride all the way over to the big coulee and have a look at the stock this afternoon. You better get started."

A sob shook her. It rubbed some of the hardness out of his face and his quick step took him to the window. He turned her around and took her in his arms.

"What is it, Lucy?" he asked, and the hardness was gone from his voice. "Can it be that after all he's done to you that you're still filled with pity for him?"

"No, there isn't a drop of pity in me," she answered without looking up, her head buried on his shoulder. "I despise him! He made me hate my own people

—even Ma! She didn't want me to marry him, but he got around her with a new stove, and she let him have me. I was too young and too dumb to understand what they were doing to me. All I could see was a pair of red shoes and a couple cheap dresses. Well, I've learned! I've learned a lot! I'm not going to make another mistake. I just want to be happy and decent, like other people."

He tilted her face and pressed his cheek against hers. "I'll make it all up to you, Lucy. I won't be a hired hand much longer. I've got my eye on a little place over McDermitt way. I'll have to run it on shares at first, but it'll be ours some day. Real mattresses on the beds; no straw ticks; a water pump right in the kitchen. You've heard me talk about it before—Why are you crying, Lucy?"

"I—I guess it's because I'm afraid. I don't want anything to happen to that dream, Chad. It's worth waiting for—no matter how long it takes. I know right is right. Doing something wrong never made anything right. Promise me you'll never harm Balaam."

Holderness gazed at her fondly, a note of soft, amused laughter on his lips. "If that's all that's troubling you, forget it. I told you I wouldn't do anything foolish. If we have to, we can wait this thing out. Give it time and it'll settle itself."

He didn't believe anything of the sort. If they went on drifting like this, the weeks would run into months and the months into years and life would get away from them and leave them old, hanging onto an empty dream. There was only one way out. He saw it clearly and realized what he must do.

But what he had said satisfied Lucy. With a little cry of relief, she pulled

down his head and her lips found his mouth.

"Oh, Chad, that was what I wanted you to say! You had me scared—brooding that way. We can wait—no matter how long it takes!"

THE short winter afternoon was gone by the time Holderness got back from the coulee. In the leaden twilight he got down at the barn and busied himself with the evening chores. The piebald mare was not in her stall. Balaam was late getting home. Holderness had only a few minutes to speculate about it, when the older man rode up to the barn door and swung down effortlessly though the cold had knifed through him on the long ride up the creek. That part of his face visible above his bushy black beard was a cherry red.

Holderness came out and took the mare. "You want me to give you a hand with the flour?"

Instead of answering Balaam plucked the heavy sack off his horse as though it were a trifle and slung it over his shoulder. He was a burly, barrel-chested man and still as strong as an ox.

"How did you find the stock in the coulee?" he demanded, gruff as usual.

"It's wintering fine. There's some snow left in there but the dry graze is showing through."

"Any hoss tracks?"

Holderness shook his head. "Nobody been in there but us."

He wondered what prompted the question. Balaam gave him no satisfaction, limiting his response to a low grunt. Hitching the sack of flour to a more comfortable position, he trudged

up to the house. Though he had no path to guide him, he missed the door by only a step. Lucy was there to lead him in.

Holderness finished his chores, still puzzled over the question about the horse tracks.

"Nobody would try to run off another man's beef this time of year," he mused. "It can't be that. He heard something down at the Hendy's. Some stranger drifting through the country. That'd be enough to make Balaam prick up his ears—all that money cached in the house."

Night had fallen and the wind from the northwest was freshening sharply by the time Holderness opened the kitchen door. Lucy was cooking supper. Balaam had pulled off his boots and sat by the stove. He had lived so long in the open that his leathery hide seemed to exude the pungent, nostril-quivering tang of sagebrush and that indefinable smell of all wild things. He was complaining about the price Pete Hendy had demanded for the sack of flour.

"Charged me four bits more'n its worth," he grumbled. "Flour's two-and-a-quarter a hundred in White Pine. I told him so."

"You didn't have any trouble with Pete?" Lucy asked.

"No, but I let him know he was gouging me. I'll know better next time. I wouldn't have taken the flour if we wasn't out."

Lucy was only mildly interested. She said, "Maybe Pete feels it costs him something to haul supplies out from town."

"Hunh!" Balaam snorted scornfully. "Pete Hendy ain't that careful with other folks; just with me. I'm blind, and he figgers he can trim me. He owes

the bank money. Payin' seven per cent on it, but he sends his wife to town last week for the rest of the winter. Why don't he keep her to home where she belongs? Instead, she's gallivantin around White Pine, spendin' borrowed money. That's what I mean! By grab, nobody's followin' me around by the dollars I throw away!"

"—Or the pennies," Holderness added, from across the kitchen. Balaam's ranting was following its usual pattern. Holderness had listened to it a thousand times. Somehow, it got under his skin this evening. "Strikes me it was pretty decent of Pete to send his missus to town. It's been a long winter."

"Yeh?" Balaam sneered. "One fool always admires another. What do you know about money? You never put a hundred dollars together in your life. I'm more'n twice as old as you, and blind to boot, but I'm a better man than you; I got a head on my shoulders; I know how to look ahead. If you had any gumption, you wouldn't be workin' for me; you'd have a good job or be workin' for yourself."

The contempt in which Balaam held him came as no surprise to Holderness; there had been other occasions like this. But he was in a mood to resent it tonight and only Lucy's imploring glance and quick intercession kept him in his chair.

"Two men broke into the express office in White Pine two nights ago and got away with eight hundred dollars," she said. "Pete told Balaam about it. The sheriff says they're heading for Idaho. Balaam's afraid they may come this way."

So that was the reason for the question at the barn about horse tracks.

"I didn't say I was afraid!" Balaam

objected angrily. "But you keep your eyes open, Holderness. If you see any strangers, don't take no chances; use your gun." He turned back to the matter of the flour. "I don't see how you use so much, Lucy. You must be wastin' it."

"I bake only twice a week," she told him. "You like your bread. Half a loaf at a meal is nothing for you."

"Is that so?" he flung back churlishly. "I reckon you and Holderness get your share. You be savin', Lucy, that's all I got to say!"

It was the beginning of another evening that followed the pattern of a hundred others.

THE weather turned milder for the next few days. Holderness was glad to be abroad. Balaam usually accompanied him.

Nothing was seen of the two men who had robbed the express office and no more was said about them. One afternoon, a week later, he returned from a long trip down the creek to report to Balaam that he had met Bob Hendy, Pete's younger brother.

"He thought you might be interested, Balaam, in an auction over at Iron Point. The bank's taken over the old Bascom ranch and is going to sell the stock for what it'll bring. There's only about a hundred head, not enough to attract the big buyers. Bob says it's nice stuff and ought to go cheap. Sale begins at ten tomorrow morning."

Balaam was interested. He melted sufficiently enough to say, "I'm glad you ran into Bob. If the price is right, I'd like to have that Bascom herd."

"We'd have to leave before daylight to get there in time," Holderness observed.

"We'll go," said Balaam.

Holderness was in the barn, busy with the chores, when Lucy found an excuse to take her down. He felt her anxiety even before she said a word.

"Chad, why are you urging Balaam to go to Iron Point?"

"Urging him?" he repeated, regarding her with what seemed to be genuine surprise. "I'm not urging him to do anything."

"It sounded to me as though you were," she insisted.

He pulled down the corners of his mouth, resentment of her suspicion building up in him.

"Lucy—you been watching me like a hawk ever since we had our last talk. You saddled a bronc the other day when Balaam and me were turning stock back in the long canyon. You were out there spying on us. I saw your tracks."

"Yes," she admitted. "I don't know why I did it. I just got to worrying something terrible. It's a good fifty miles to Iron Point. You'll have to cross White River. There'll be ice running in it, I suppose. All this mild weather. And then you'll have to climb over Dinwiddie's Rim. There'll be a lot of snow up there. It's treacherous enough at this time of the year for a man with good eyes. Balaam shouldn't try it."

"If that's how you feel, and he wants to bid on the cows, he can give me some money and I'll go alone."

Lucy shook her head. "He wouldn't trust anybody with his money. I know the two of you will go. You make sure nothing happens to him, Chad."

"If anything happens to him it won't

be my doing," he declared flatly. "You better get back to the house before he wonders what you're doing down here. There's times when I ask myself if he misses as much as we think he does."

She had taken a step toward the door. "What makes you say that?" she asked anxiously, turning back.

"I don't know—just a feeling I've got."

They had breakfast by lamplight the following morning. The weather was colder and the sky held a threat of snow.

"When shall I expect you back, Balaam?" Lucy asked, as they were leaving for the barn.

"Sometime tomorrow," he replied gruffly. "You can pull down some hay for the hosses. They don't need much."

She remained at the door and heard them ride away a few minutes later. She had been left alone before, but never so alone as now, it seemed.

I won't go back to bed, she thought. I couldn't sleep. I'll give the house a good going over; I'll feel better if I keep busy.

She gave the stove such a cleaning as it had not had all winter, and though a fine, hard snow was driving down, with half a gale behind it, she carried the bed ticks into the yard and shook them out, the chaff, the dry straw, and the snow swirling about her. When she had refilled them with fresh straw from the barn, it was all she could do to get the unwieldy bags back to the house, the storm threatening to tear them out of her hands every moment.

By noon, she was tiring. Weariness only sharpened her feeling of anxiety. Her mother had lived in a world that was bounded and crisscrossed at every

turn with premonitions and superstitions. Lucy and her brothers and sisters had become Americanized enough at an early age to scoff at those dark forebodings.

Must be a lot of Ma left in me, she thought as she got herself a bite to eat and the sense of impending tragedy beat at her incessantly. I'm imagining things; the trail over Dinwiddie can't be as bad as everyone says it is or Chad wouldn't have thought of risking it.

It was strange, but her fears did not include the possibility that Holderness might meet with disaster; she knew he'd come home safely. It was Balaam and how he would fare that obsessed her.

She got through the day, somehow. When she went to bed, she left a light burning in the kitchen window. Though she was thoroughly tired, sleep did not come easily. The clock struck twelve before she dozed off. Sleep brought her no relief, for she was troubled by dreams that were even more sinister than the fears that had troubled her when awake.

The next morning dragged on endlessly for her. By noon, she was at the window every few minutes, hoping to catch a glimpse of Balaam and Holderness, though her good sense told her they could not possibly get back before evening.

Finally, when she saw them, they were together. They were not driving any cows. They stopped at the barn. Balaam got down and trudged on to the house. She had the door open for him.

"You're all right?" she asked, in a tone that was incredulous.

"Why wouldn't I be all right?" he growled. "Holderness is coughin' like a fool. He fell into the river."

"Chad?" she cried.

Heretofore she had always been at great pains never to display more than a casual, distant interest in Holderness but that sharp, unguarded cry was so charged with concern and so revealing that not even a blind man could fail to understand its meaning.

Balaam turned away, his mouth hard and ugly. "We was foridin' the river on our way back, when my hoss slipped and started to go down. I could have stayed with the mare and righted myself, but he reached out and grabbed the mare. She dragged him out of the saddle. He had to swim for it. It gave him a cold ride."

"You didn't stop to build a fire and dry his clothes?" she demanded, a cold fury in her voice.

"It was late," said Balaam. "I wanted to get home."

"But twenty miles in this freezing weather—soaked to the skin! It could be the death of him!"

Balaam shrugged unfeelingly. "He's awful young to die." There was an obscure implication behind the observation which Lucy missed in her agitation. "If you haven't got somethin' on the stove, get supper started. I ain't et since mornin'."

She just stood there for a moment. How she hated and despised him! And how wrong she had been in feeling that if a mishap occurred on the long, apparently fruitless trip to Iron Point it would befall only him.

She went to the window and saw Chad coming up from the barn, his wrenching, wheezing cough reaching her ears. For want of something better to say, she said, "You didn't buy the cows?"

"No!" Balaam replied as he divested himself of his heavy coat. "Ab Stillwell bid 'em up too steep for me."

Whenever anything failed to go Balaam's way he invariably snarled about it for a day or two. If Lucy had had her wits about her this evening, it would not have escaped her that he betrayed a marked lack of disappointment over the way things had gone at Iron Point.

Holderness came in, his clothes glazed with ice. Lucy rushed up to him. She could not hold back a cry of dismay.

"Chad, you look terrible! You should have stopped and built a fire!" She put her hand against his cheek. "You're sick. You're running a fever!"

"I feel a little dizzy," he admitted. "I'll get out of these things and go to bed. I don't suppose there's a little whisky in the house."

"No, there ain't," Balaam snapped. "Whisky never helped anyone 'cept the man who sells it. You'll be all right by mornin'."

Lucy told Holderness she'd make some hot tea and bring it in to him.

Supper was late. Balaam growled about it. He and Lucy were at the table when Sheriff Tom Effingham rode up to the house, on his way back to White Pine from Argenta, the little mining town on the Nevada-Idaho line. Doc Lingard had gone up with him and the deputy sheriff, Clem Hardesty. Two men who had gone to work recently at the smelter had had a gun fight. One had been seriously wounded; the other had fled.

"I figured it might be the same pair that cracked the express-company safe," Effingham explained. "It was, sure enough. I don't know whether this fella Holmquist is going' to live or not. Doc is stayin' there over night. I left Clem with him."

"I only wish you had Doctor Lingard with you," Lucy said, her anxiety over Holderness so urgent that she was beyond caring what Balaam thought about it. "Chad is awful sick."

She told the sheriff what had happened.

"I wish you'd have a look at him, Mr. Effingham."

"Of course," Effingham agreed. "I'm no doctor, understand."

When he came out of the bedroom several minutes later, he was shaking his head. "He's a mighty sick man, Mrs. Goss. Got a high fever. If you ask me, it's pneumonia. He needs a doctor—and quick."

"You people are takin' on about nothin'," Balaam grumbled. "I tell you he'll be all right tomorrow."

"Maybe."

The sheriff pulled his mustache down over his lower lip and regarded him frigidly. Tom Effingham was only a cow-country sheriff, but there was a wisdom in him that ran far beyond the call of duty. He knew Balaam Goss, and he had seen and heard enough in the few minutes he had been there to tell him how matters stood in this house. He turned to Lucy.

"You git me a bite to eat real quick and I'll head back to Argenta and fetch Lingard. I reckon it'll be nigh daylight before we git back. In the meantime, keep that boy's feet warm. Fetch in some snow and keep a cold compress on his head. You might even bathe him with snow water. And keep him out of all drafts. Don't open that window in there."

He was ready to leave in ten minutes. Lucy thanked him for what he was doing, but it was what he saw in her eyes, more than in her words, that sent him riding swiftly into the night.

LUCY was in and out of the house every few minutes, setting pans of water to freeze or bringing in fresh wood for the stove. Wood had to be hauled seventeen miles from the slopes of Morrison Mountain. Balaam never permitted a stick of it to be wasted. She expected him to complain tonight as she kept the stove roaring. Strangely, he said nothing.

The wind was tearing at the flimsy house, shaking it to its foundation at times. It was a savage night for a man to be abroad. Lucy reminded herself of it every time she stepped outside. Where was Effingham now? Seven Springs? He could have gotten that far. Oh, if he'd only hurry! Chad's condition was worsening steadily. She was afraid to give him water. Her mother had told her that water only fed a fever. But she would hold a piece of ice to his lips and that quieted him.

If Lingaard were only there! The thought echoed incessantly in her mind as the night wore on and Holderness grew delirious. She had a child's faith in the efficacy of a doctor. It was as though the mere presence of the man was all that was needed to effect a cure.

To Lucy's utter amazement, Balaam offered to sit up with the sick man. "Fetch in some more wood so I can keep the fire goin'," he told her. "You get a little sleep; I'll call you if there's any change in him."

Lucy forgave him a lot for that. She went to their bedroom and pulled the blankets over her without undressing. She thought sleep would be impossible but she was so emotionally exhausted that she fell into a sound slumber.

How long she slept, she didn't know. It was the banging of the kitchen door that awakened her. The house felt cold.

Holderness was moaning in his delirium. She rushed to him. The blankets had been thrown aside; the window was open; so was the front door and the back; the fire was out. Balaam sat beside the cold stove, swathed in his heavy coat, and wide awake.

Understanding crashed through her. Snatching up the blankets she threw them over Holderness and ran to the doors and windows and closed them with a bang. She faced Balaam, then, half crazed. She knew why he had offered to sit up with Chad; why he had pretended to be sympathetic.

"Balaam, you've killed him! He can't get well now! You planned it this way! It's murder, even if the law can't touch you for it!"

He grumbled an excuse. "He was rantin' somethin' about bein' on fire—wantin' air—"

"No!" she cried. "You're lying! You hate him!"

"Yes, I hate the two of you!" he said fiercely, abandoning any pretense of innocence. "I may be blind, but I'm no fool; I know what's been goin' on here. The two of you were plannin' to kill me; you wanted my money. You'll never touch a penny of it now. I made the mare shy, when we was fordin' the river. The only accident was that he wasn't drowned."

Left speechless, Lucy had to grasp the back of a chair for support. She saw him get up heavily, his cruel laughter whipping her into such a frenzy that, for the first time in her life, she was free of fear of him.

"Reckon you're beginnin' to realize it wasn't me who was bein' fooled," he taunted. "And don't think you can reach into the red lamp and find anythin'. The money ain't there no longer. Go on, look! See for yourself!"

The old Bohemian glass lamp was a family heirloom, brought to America by her mother and passed on to Lucy when she married Balaam. The burner was attached to a metal container, large enough to hold a quart of kerosene. It fitted snugly into the glass base. For years, it had stood on the long kitchen sideboard, a jagged piece missing from the hand-painted glass shade, unused as a lamp but providing an innocent-looking repository for the almost eighteen thousand dollars that Balaam had put together.

"Why don't you have a look?" he roared, rocking with laughter and enjoying his miserable triumph to the full.

Lucy refused to be goaded into going to the lamp. She had always regarded the money as his, not hers; that he had removed it from its hiding-place meant nothing now. In her mind there was room for only one thought: what he had done to Chad. But Balaam was not to be cheated out of his amusement.

"You won't look, but you're wonderin' where it is," he went on. "Wal, you won't find it! I hid it where I knew the two of you would never think of lookin' for it!" His merriment ended, and in quite another mood, he said, "There'll be bills to pay. I'm tellin' you now, I won't pay 'em. Let the county bury him."

"You needn't worry; you won't be called on to pay a thing!" she flung back wildly, her head throbbing. She felt that reason was tottering in her. "Chad has his own money—more than enough!"

"What money has he got?" Balaam jeered. "I know his kind; spend it before he gits it! He hasn't a hundred dollars to his name!"

"More than that, Balaam—much more," she said tensely and without inflection. "When I shook the old straw out of his bed tick yesterday, over four hundred dollars fell out."

Panic seized Balaam. "What happened to the rest of it?" he gasped.

"That's all I found. It was snowing hard. I—"

"No! No! No! You're lyin'! I put all my money in his bed! All of it, y'understand!" He was beside himself by now, his huge bulk trembling. "Don't tell me the snow blew it away!"

The thought of his precious money being scattered over the wastelands, to lie buried until spring came, was more than he could bear.

"You've got it!" he raged, unwilling to believe it was gone. "You hand it over to me, Lucy!"

He lunged at her savagely, determined to force the money from her. She backed away, but only until she was able to reach the gun that he kept on the shelf above the window.

"Balaam, I've got your gun," she said, her voice pinched and unrecognizable. "I'm pointing it at you. I'm going to kill you—for all that you've done to me and to Chad—"

"No! You wouldn't dare! you wouldn't dare, Lucy!"

"I dare, Balaam. First, there's something I want you to know. I love Chad—I've wanted him always—but it's never gone as far as you think; I've never done anything to shame you—"

The gun spoke, then, and she fired again and again until it was empty. She looked down at him, huddled grotesquely on the floor, and knew he was dead. It was all she was to remember for a long, long time.

WHAT do you think of it, up there?" I inquired of Effingham. It had taken me several weeks to worm the story out of him. I had dropped into his office this evening to read what I had on paper.

The sheriff filled his vile-smelling briar painstakingly, a habit of his when he wanted to be particularly careful of what he had to say.

"Wal," he declared critically, "that's about the way it happened. I'm glad you didn't try to dress it up. Along in there, you gave me a pat on the back. Wasn't no need to do that."

I smiled at his modesty. We had become fast friends during my long stay in White Pine. "Of course, it's only half the story," I reminded him. "When are you going to give me the rest of it, Tom?"

Effingham puffed his pipe thoughtfully. "There ain't much more to tell," he replied, in soft, musing tones. "Linggaard and I got back to Balaam's place just about dawn. The lights was burning but no one came to the door to meet us, so we just pushed in. Balaam lay on the kitchen floor as dead as he was ever goin' to be. We looked for Lucy. She wan't there. Doc went to work on Holderness. I wouldn't have given a nickel for the boy's chances. Doc didn't agree with me; he said it was the crisis. He figured Chad was young and strong and if he could be kept alive for the rest of the day that he'd make it. He did, of course. Must have been a week or more before Doc thought it was safe to bring him to town."

The sheriff shook his head over some old memory.

"Strange," he continued, "how you can't stop some men. There was Holderness, at the brink of death, and he

comes back to go on for years and become one of the biggest stockmen in this part of the state."

"But Lucy—what became of her?" I asked.

"After daylight that mornin', I started lookin' for her. Some fresh snow was on the ground. Her tracks was easy to follow. I found her down the crick, about a mile and half, on hands and knees, grubbin' under one clump of sage after another, crazy as a loon, and babblin' somethin' about Balaam's money. I didn't git the drift of it then—I brought her in to White Pine that afternoon."

"Was she ever brought to trial for killing Balaam?"

Effingham nodded. "About three years later, when she was pronounced cured and released from the state institution for mental cases. We had a young squirt for prosecutor, at the time. He figured he could make political hay out of bringin' her to trial. The judge instructed the jury to acquit her on grounds of irresponsibility. The jury never left the box. Holderness was waitin'. First thing we knew, they got married. He had an interest in that McDermitt ranch by then. She was always timid and had an occasional bad spell. But he waited on her hand and foot; it used to give me a funny feelin' inside to see how kind and patient he was with her."

I had often heard it said that there wasn't any sentiment in Tom Effingham, and yet I had noticed that he always spoke of Lucy with great tenderness and sympathy. As he paused and leaned back in his chair this evening, I could see that he was moved.

"That leaves only Balaam's money to be accounted for," I said, after a

decent interval. "Was that how Holderness got his start?"

"No, Chad never had a dollar of it. Balaam's money was never found—beyond what Lucy picked up and a couple of fifty-dollar bills that Bob Hendy found hangin' on the branches of a dead willow 'way down the crick the followin' summer. Bob came to me at once, figurin' a crime had been committed somewheres."

"You knew it was part of Balaam's fortune?"

"Not exactly. I had an idea, but I couldn't be sure, so I didn't say anythin'. I spent a couple days along Dry Crick with the Hendy's. We didn't turn up a thing. Back in April, when the snow was goin' off, a flash flood had torn through that country, rippin' up everythin'."

"I've seen those badlands," I remarked. "I can imagine what a flood would do to that light, loose soil. Buried the money, of course."

The sheriff nodded. "That's the only explanation. Three years later, when Lucy was able to tell us what had happened, half of White Pine was up there, diggin' around. Balaam's eighteen thousand was never located. It was mean, unhappy money. Folks said that in order to put that much together, Balaam had to dig it right out of the grass roots. But I always figured he dug it out of himself—and out of Lucy."

"The two of 'em are gone now, and so is Holderness; and that money is back in the badlands, rottin' away. Mebbe it's just as well it is."

THE END

Solution to West Acrostic Puzzle

on page 109

D	O	G	I	E				W
E				A				R
C				R	I	A	T	A
K	A	K		M				N
	G			H	A	R	D	G
	E			O	R		O	I
B	R	O	N	K		B		E
			K			I		R
C	A	V	Y		B	E	T	S



Free-for-All

"CODE OF THE WEST," the Zane Grey novel abridged in this issue of ZGWM, is truly a Western with a difference—no one gets killed! Nevertheless there is plenty of action, as fist fights, practical jokes, and general merriment abound. All in all, it's a Western in a lighter vein—and we're betting that all Zane Grey fans are going to get a powerful kick out of it.

★ This month's novelette, "Long Winter," is the second original story by Harry Sinclair Drago which ZGWM has had the privilege of publishing. As in the first, "Dusty Saddles," Mr. Drago, one of America's top Western writers, has used the same background and has used a similar scheme for telling the tale; still, it's completely different! "It was one I just had to write," he comments of "Long Winter," adding that though "it's tough and a little grim I hope you'll like it." Needless to say, we did like it; and now we pass it along for ZGWM readers to enjoy.

★ "Too Good With a Gun" is a sure-enough "first story," marking not only the first ZGWM appearance for author Lewis B. Patten but also Mr. Patten's initial fiction sale. In reply to our request for personal data he writes: "For the past five years I have been operating a small cattle ranch in western Colorado but sold out to devote my time to writing. Previously, I have operated a sawmill, been a field author for the Colorado Department of Revenue, and spent four years in the U.S. Navy, three of them in China with the Yangtze River Patrol. I have a wife and three children; a good many hobbies, among them hunting and fishing; I like tools, machinery, and livestock; and someday I expect to go back to rural living. (He's a Denverite—Ed.) I sincerely hope I may become one of your regular contributors."

★ Calvin L. Boswell, author of "Solid Citizen," is also a newcomer To ZGWM,

if not to magazine fiction. Mr. Boswell comments: "I have been riding herd on the old typewriter ever since I sold my first yarn, as a youngster, to *Golden West* when it was being published by Carwood. Along the way have been a lot of sales, a fair share of rejections, and plenty of fun. California's Mother Lode country has been a sort of second home to me for a good number of years, and 'Solid Citizen' was the outcome of a yarn by an old-timer plus a bit taken from legendary history, seasoned with a generous sprinkling of imagination."

★ Wayne D. Overholser has been absent from ZGWM's pages for a longish time, but a yarn like "The Steadfast" is always worth waiting for! As we said in accepting it, it's especially pleasing to get something as meaty as "The

Steadfast" in the brief compass of a few short pages.

★ Along sometime last summer William MacLeod Raine wrote us that he was "at loose ends" between books and asked if we would be interested in an article on famous gunmen he has met. "At the turn of the century I was a sort of roving reporter and made contact with a good many famous, or notorious, characters. Of course my acquaintance with them would be chiefly a thread on which to string more interesting stuff than our acquaintance." Naturally we responded favorably to the idea, "Gunmen I Have Met" resulted, and seldom will readers benefit so largely from an author's having been at loose ends!

—THE EDITORS.

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QUICKSAND

CATTLE, LIKE SOME HUMANS, will range in territory that wasn't meant for man nor beast, and it's at such times that a guardian angel in chaps and spurs shows up. Here, the cowpoke has dabbed his rope round the cow's horns and his pony is trying hard for a footing to drag her out of the quicksand she's in. The cow on the end of the whale line is wild and spooky and not at all co-operative. In her panic, the critter keeps fighting the reata and getting herself into deeper and more treacherous bogging. The 'poke, who has only limited space in which to work without getting bogged down himself, tries to take advantage of every move the cow makes. If he's careless for one second or if his hoss isn't cow-wise, hoss and rider may be pulled over sideways or, worse, wound up in the rope. The hardest job is to get the lariat off the cow's horns after she's dragged free. The cowboy rides round and yanks her feet from under her; the pony gives him enough slack to take the rope off; then he makes a running jump for the saddle — maybe an inch ahead of a mad cow showing her thanks with sharp horns!

DAN MULLER



No.9

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN

MAGAZINE

*All Star
Issue!*

★ Zane Grey
CODE OF THE WEST

★ Harry Sinclair Drago
LONG WINTER

★ Lewis B. Patten

★ Calvin L. Boswell

★ Wayne D. Overholser

In This Issue

CODE OF THE WEST by Zane Grey

When a daring, flirtatious, devil-may-care representative of a jazz-mad generation drops plump into the midst of a staid and respectable Western family, problems are bound to multiply like jack rabbits—and they do just that when Georgie May Stockwell arrives in Tonto Basin from the East. Not understanding the fun-loving but basically serious natures of the sturdy cowpokes, she indulges in indiscriminate flirtations which causes really serious trouble. How Georgie May is finally tamed and peace and sanity are restored to the Tonto provide a fittingly exciting climax to a fast moving, light-hearted story.

LONG WINTER by Harry Sinclair Drago

A miserly old rancher with a hidden hoard, a pretty and neglected young wife, and a lovestruck hired man—explosive ingredients for a grim rangeland drama. A ZGWM original novelette.

SOLID CITIZEN by Calvin L. Boswell

Since he isn't placing enough gold out of his claim to convince Henrietta Gault she should marry him, Bonaparte Biggs sets out to make a solid citizen of himself.

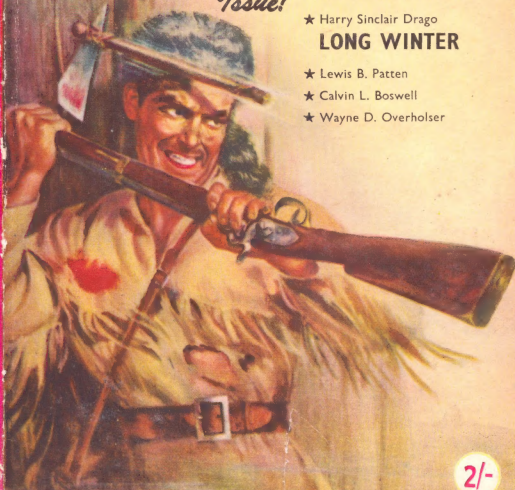
THE STEADFAST by Wayne D. Overholser

Pioneers can make a new community but the job isn't finished then; it's up to the next generation to keep that community healthy.

—plus many more exciting and thrilling stories and features of the old West.

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

★ No. 9



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